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DOUBLE ISSUE

THE
NATION.

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THE SECRET US WAR IN PAKISTAN

DECEMBER 21/28, 2009
TheNation.com

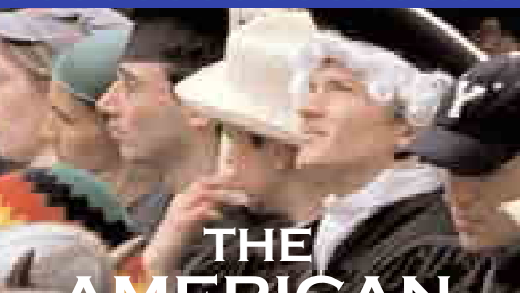
• KARACHI

US SPECIAL FORCES
ENLIST BLACKWATER'S
HELP ON COVERT
OPERATIONS

AN INVESTIGATION BY
JEREMY SCAHILL

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Letters

Deficit Hawks Come Home to Roost

ARCATA, CALIF.

I agree with William Greider: Obama should *not* heed the deficit hawks ["Deficit Hawk Hysteria," Nov. 16]. Greider's look at the World War II deficit, 120 percent of annual GDP—double today's level—supports this. During the war there were shortages of consumer goods and rationing. But we were able to make a remarkable transition from a guns to a butter economy, absorbing the millions of GIs no longer needed for military duty. In contrast, we have 10.2 percent unemployment and stimulus spending that could turn into stagflation. Still, stimulus is what the economy needs now, and green jobs might work if there were something to cap consumer prices and spending. Perhaps precautionary saving to avoid the possibility of layoffs, with government policies encouraging savings—i.e., through the issuance of "energy independence bonds"—might work. And perhaps increased savings could be combined with higher energy prices and subsidies derived from auctioning cap-and-trade allowances.

DANIEL IHARA

COOPERSVILLE, MICH.

William Greider, Paul Krugman et al. have learned their history lessons. It would be a mistake to tighten our belts, as Franklin Roosevelt learned. But we are not living in the 1940s, and the hyperconsumerism Greider advocates to move the economy out of its doldrums (whether it originates with the feds or us) is not sustainable.

GORDON ALDERINK

Greider Replies

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Many readers were offended, even appalled, by my plea for big spending from Washington to restore the economy. These two letter writers are on board for the concept if not all the details. "Hyperconsumerism" is the opposite of what I proposed. I foresee a period of austerity in

letters@thenation.com



which consumption is essentially suppressed so households can save and restore their balance sheets. The economy would be driven instead by government investment in future production and the industrial transformation to a less profligate, more sustainable society. It is not World War II, but we are in an epic emergency.

WILLIAM GREIDER

Gorbachev: Man With a Vision

WATERTOWN, MASS.

Katrina vanden Heuvel and Stephen F. Cohen's interview ["Gorbachev on 1989," Nov. 16] is an important contribution to the historical record and reminds us of the critical importance of integrity and courage, as well as Proverbs' lesson "A people without a vision will perish." That said, Gorbachev missed one of the greatest factors that contributed to the end of the cold war: the nuclear freeze and "Euromissile" movements in the United States and Western Europe, as well as democratic movements in Eastern Europe.

During the last years of the Carter administration, the militarist right wing's "B Team" stoked a renewed US-Soviet nuclear confrontation with its calls for the deployment of Pershing II and Tomahawk cruise missiles in Europe. These could theoretically decapitate Soviet leadership from their nuclear forces within eight minutes and then destroy Moscow's nuclear arsenal.

Even before Ronald Reagan was elected, Randall Forsberg and the Boston Study Group conceived "A Call to Halt the Arms Race," and E.P. Thompson, Mary Kaldor and others in Britain and Europe launched the European disarmament movement, demanding disarmament and supporting Eastern European democratic forces.

During the 1980 election, which brought Reagan and the B Team to power, Randy Kehler, Frances Crowe and others took the question of the freeze to voters in western Massachusetts, providing the model for the 1981 and '82 town meeting votes across

(continued on page 22)

Obama's War

At a time when the continuing economic crisis is creating ever more hardship for the vast majority of Americans and placing ever greater demands on the federal budget, we need

clearheaded leadership that is able to strip away myth and dogma and define afresh our most pressing problems and the right strategy for dealing with them. Sadly, in announcing his administration's decision to send 30,000 more American troops to Afghanistan on top of the 68,000 already there, President Obama has fallen short of this test of leadership.

Not only did the president and his national security team reject far less costly options that would have allowed us to disengage militarily from the conflict in a responsible way; they have decided on a strategy that is so full of muddled thinking and so wasteful of lives and resources that it must be opposed as contrary to the best interests of the American people. And his vow to begin withdrawing troops in July 2011 seems not so much part of a carefully considered stabilization strategy for Afghanistan as a way to placate growing Congressional and popular opposition to a war entering its ninth year.

As Obama argued in his West Point speech, the principal purpose of our involvement is "to disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future." But he failed to explain why that goal requires 100,000 troops at a cost of nearly \$100 billion. By the military's own calculation, there are at most 100 Al Qaeda operatives, mostly low-level, in Afghanistan, the leadership having fled to Pakistan years ago.

In making this war the key to America's national security strategy against terrorism, Obama has chosen to perpetuate some damaging myths. The first of these is the notion that the greatest danger to

American security is a terrorist attack from Afghanistan. This ignores the fact that 9/11 was not launched from Afghanistan and that Al Qaeda can operate relatively freely not only in parts of Pakistan but in Somalia, Yemen and other countries. The best way to keep Americans safe from terrorism is through effective intelligence, expert police work and judicious homeland defense. These practical measures cost far less than war and occupation in Muslim lands, which arouse hatred of the United States—and give strength to Islamist extremists.

The president nonetheless suggested that there is a larger US interest in stabilizing Afghanistan. But if that is so, he did not explain how a strategy that has so far failed will be successful in the future. He seems to be buying into the counterinsurgency myth: namely, that by deploying more forces to protect the Afghan population in urban centers, by laying down more benchmarks for the government, by mixing in more economic assistance and by training more army and police, we can transform Afghanistan into a coherent nation-state with a functioning government.

The undeniable fact is that eight years of US occupation and war have led to a growing insurgency, fueled by anger at one of the world's most corrupt governments, run mostly by former and not-so-former warlords who were installed by the United States after 9/11. Many of these warlords are deeply involved in the opium trade, among them the brother of Hamid Karzai, the president, who was re-elected only through massive fraud. Obama was not very convincing when he acknowledged this fraud even as he declared that the resulting government was



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News & Analysis

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Peter Dreier: Healthcare hypocrisy

Ben Ehrenreich: California scheming

Anuradha Mittal: The spirit of Seattle today

Blogs Editor's Cut: New national security ideas

Robert Dreyfuss: Exit 2011?

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consistent with Afghanistan's laws and Constitution. And he did not inspire confidence that we will improve our ability to train the Afghan army and police, given current desertion rates.

Although Obama declared that success in Afghanistan is "inextricably linked" to our "partnership" with Pakistan, he has turned reality on its head by embracing the Pakistan myth: that stabilizing Afghanistan is the key to stabilizing Pakistan. But US pressure on the Taliban in Afghanistan is pushing more militants into Pakistan, with the potential for upsetting the delicate political balance there and spreading the Pakistani insurgency beyond the border regions. As many experts argue, elements within Pakistan's military and intelligence services support the Taliban not because they are afraid we're going to leave but because they worry we are going to stay and further open up their backyard to Indian influence. As we should have learned from the past few years, Pakistanis will confront Islamist extremists only when they feel threatened by them, not because a very unpopular Washington wants them to. The Obama administration is deluding itself and the American people if it believes its counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan is going to change that reality in any appreciable way. And America's covert counterinsurgency in Pakistan itself (see Jeremy Scahill's investigation on page 11) is all too likely to deepen what is already widespread anti-American sentiment among Pakistanis.

This is a tragic moment for the nation and for Obama's presidency. It is true that it would have taken great courage for Obama to do the right thing and end his predecessor's war. He would have faced harsh blowback from the right, the military and the media establishment. But in a war-weary and economically distressed nation, Obama could have used his impressive oratorical and political skills to marshal the public to his side. Instead, with this escalation, we see the continuing grip of the national security state, whose premises have been shared by conservative and liberal hawks for close to sixty years, and which essentially remain unchallenged among the establishment and the mainstream media. Obama is now at risk of being held hostage to this mindset, as a war bequeathed to him by a reckless and destructive administration becomes his own.

The failure to explore alternatives to military escalation reveals a deeper structural problem: the fact that there are too few countervailing voices or centers of power and authority to challenge the liberal hawks and interventionists, and rarely are they allowed to enter the halls of power.

Our work now as progressives is to expose the premises of this failed national security state as no longer capable of addressing the challenges of our time, from global pandemics and global warming to economic inequality and instability to nuclear proliferation and, yes, decentralized networks of terrorists. We must be strong advocates for diplomacy and security rather than military ventures that cost American lives and legitimacy. Toward the end of his speech, Obama said, "Our security and leadership does not come solely from the strength of our arms. It derives from our people." Let's hold him to his word and channel the widespread disappointment over this misguided escalation into a broad-based movement—working with Congress, activists and concerned citizens everywhere—to bring our soldiers home.



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Climate Fog



As Barack Obama prepares to head to the climate change conference in Copenhagen, there are some distressing signs about the drift of public opinion on the issue.

A recent *Washington Post*/ABC poll found that the percentage of Americans who think global warming is happening at all has dropped eight points in just the past year. A comprehensive Pew poll released in October was even more worrying: only 57 percent of respondents think there's evidence of warming (down from 71 percent last year), and just 36 percent think it's because of human activity (down from 47 percent). The number of people who think it's a "very serious problem" declined to just 35 percent.

There are still bright spots: a majority of people favor cap-and-trade legislation. But how is it, one must ask, that just as Congress has finally begun to address the issue, and the world is poised to focus on it more than it ever has, that Americans seem to be curling up into a ball of denial?

There are a number of factors. The past few years have been fairly temperate. The economic crisis has pushed issues perceived as not immediately vital to the back burner. And a good portion of the decline in belief in the climate science comes from sheer partisan polarization: for certain Americans in the era of death panels, birthers and Glenn Beck, if Barack Obama says the world is warming, then it must not be.

But overall, the public opinion data on climate point to a deeper problem with the way the capping of carbon has been sold, both by Democratic lawmakers and progressive activists—that is, as a bill that seems to have nothing to do with catastrophic climate change. "Make no mistake: this is a jobs bill," President Obama said about the House-passed version of cap and trade (the name of which—American Clean Energy and Security Act—manages to avoid mentioning climate). That bill's co-sponsor, Ed Markey, echoed the claim, saying, "This is a jobs bill. It will create millions of new clean energy jobs in whole new industries with incentives to drive competition in the energy marketplace." Others have taken the same tack: an SEIU ad in favor of cap and trade, for example, says that "America must end our economic crisis and dependence

on foreign oil." How? "A clean energy jobs bill."

This is all true, of course, so far as it goes: cap and trade will create strong incentives for innovation in an economy that badly needs them and will begin re-engineering the fossil fuel economy in a way that will surely create net job benefits. Over time, if we stick to it, it will also delink our foreign and military policies from the pursuit of oil. But those aren't the main reasons to pass the bill. Stopping the planet from melting is.

I understand why proponents of a cap in carbon emissions chose this messaging strategy. They've done a ton of polling and focus-grouping, and there's overwhelming evidence that people don't care enough about the climate to motivate any broad support; that immediate concerns like jobs dwarf abstract ones like carbon dioxide. And prophecies of doom have a strong chance of backfiring and causing paralysis instead of catalyzing support. But in so overwhelmingly focusing their rhetorical energy away from the central argument about climate, the good guys have created a vacuum that the armies of reaction have rushed to fill. Which is why you have this strange situation whereby support for the main proposition that humans are warming the planet is declining markedly while support for solving the problem remains steady—though many if not most people don't know what that solution is.

This quasi bait-and-switch may seem as if it can scratch out a victory now, but once healthcare reform is finished, and the full wrath of the right wing is brought to bear on cap and trade, that support is going to weaken. There are other ways to create jobs, Republicans will argue. There are other ways to reduce our dependence on foreign oil ("drill, baby, drill"). What Democrats will have to argue is that cap and trade does all those things and might also save us from global disaster. But unless we make the climate case alongside the other ones, we won't be able to make that argument.

It's maddening that a well-funded industry of contrarians continues to wage a monstrous campaign of deceit, that the simple facts have to be fought for every day. But they do. "Climate change is happening," White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said at a recent briefing. "I don't think that's anything that is, quite frankly, among most people, in dispute anymore."

If only it were so. You cannot pass a climate bill without talking about the climate. So starting with Copenhagen, the large, unwieldy coalition committed to making sure we don't do catastrophic damage to our fellow humans around the globe needs to make sure we put climate back at the center of the climate debate.

CHRISTOPHER HAYES

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Dow Plunges on News Of Credit Crisis in the United Arab Emirates

Here's something that will make you sigh:
We're all connected to Dubai.

Confronting the Globalcrat

Geneva

You could call him the Generalissimo of Globalization. The World Trade Organization's director general, Pascal Lamy, was a bit defensive, wanting to assure us that the WTO "wasn't created as a dark club of multinationals secretly cooking plots against the people. We do things in the open. Look at our website."

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It's been a year since globalized finance brought the planet to its knees, yet here in Geneva, where in late November the WTO opened its grand "seventh ministerial," the diplomats are in denial. One confidential document from the files of WTO members—definitely *not* on the WTO website—tells us that despite financial and environmental crises, the globalizers still want to party like it's 1999.

COMMENT

In that year, just eight months before the Battle of Seattle, the WTO's Financial Services Agreement (FSA) became global law, breaking down old rules against cross-border trade in currency and financial derivatives. Financial goods spread rapidly. So did financial bads. The result: the collapse of US mortgage-backed securities slammed holders worldwide. When California home prices swooned, Iceland's banks melted.

But Lamy, throughout our lengthy one-on-one chat, insisted we see the WTO not as a corporate enforcer of deregulation but rather as the promoter of "interdependence," a kind of Oxfam or ACLU for trade. "This interdependence has a lot of good sides," he told me, "about freedom, about human rights, about technology, about media, about political civil liberties."

I suggested that, outside the WTO's gated compound below the Alps, few people associate derivatives and mortgage securitization with human rights and freedom. "They should!" Lamy said. "They should!"

I attempted to steer the director general back to the devilish details of this document, marked "ensure this text is not made publicly available": the demand of the European Union, echoed by the United States, that Brazil open its borders to derivatives trading and the sale of other exotic products of foreign banking giants. The EU nations were none too happy, it seems, that "Brazil has not yet accepted the Fifth protocol," that is, stood alone among major nations in flat-out rejecting the FSA.

Brazil's president, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, resisted hopping into the financial free-trade free-for-all, which saved his nation from most of the pain of the Great Recession, allowing its GDP to rocket upward at a 9 percent rate over the past three months. Wasn't it just a bit nuts to demand that Brazil now join the derivatives casino? Lamy replied, not unreasonably, "Trade is not the problem. The problem is whether what you trade is regulated or not."

The solution, then, to the problem of bankers gone wild is to regulate them, as they were just ten years ago. But there's a catch. As Lamy acknowledged, "In the WTO you can always claw back." Go ahead and re-regulate, but "there's a price to pay to claw back." Quite a price. Under the FSA, once a nation has stripped itself bare of banking regulations it cannot, despite the crisis, reimpose protective rules that get in the way of newly established foreign bank operations. For example, were Ecuador to follow former Federal Reserve chair Paul Volcker's advice to reinstate regulations that prevent commercial banks from gambling in derivatives, the US government, by WTO rule, would probably be able to slap a stiff tariff on every banana from Ecuador to make up for US banks' lost trading profits. In other words, it could cost a pretty penny to a treaty signer to rein in the local JPMorgan trading desk.

How did governments get tied hand and foot by the Financial Services Agreement?

When the WTO financial treaty took hold in 1999, ours was a very different planet. A month before the protest against the WTO, Robert Rubin had joined Citigroup, a megabank effectively created by the deregulation pushed by... Rubin, when he was Bill Clinton's treasury secretary. At that time Rubin was Merlin, and except for the protesters in Seattle ("ridiculous... yuppies looking for their 1960's fix," wrote the *New York Times's* Thomas Friedman), few doubted Rubin's magic.

In 1999 the international trade in equity derivatives and credit default swaps was too rare to track. But thanks to WTO treaty terms negotiated by Timothy Geithner, then assistant treasury secretary for international affairs, cross-border trade in swaps and derivatives would grow to a \$115 trillion business by 2008, the year of Citigroup's near collapse and government bailout.

A decade ago, during the Battle of Seattle, Lamy himself wore the epaulets of the financial shock force of globalization as director general of the French banking giant Crédit Lyonnais, whose privatization he engineered. On leaving, I asked him if the protesters hadn't been proven right by the crisis—that breaking down financial borders was fraught with danger.

The banker turned globalcrat insisted that the WTO's woes are not a matter of policy but of public relations. "We've realized that there was a part of our activities which needed more transparency, more explanation. We've done a lot of that, I think."

Martin Khor thinks not. As executive director of the South Centre, and as former director of the NGO Third World Network, Khor is the closest thing the anti-globalization insurgency has to a leader—and a quite successful one at that. The South Centre, based in Geneva, provides Brazil and many other developing nations with the technical firepower to defend themselves against the diktats of the United States and Europe.

Khor says the WTO's bad rep stems from its chutzpah in pressuring developing nations to replicate, in the guise of trade rules, the deregulatory frenzy that put the United States and Europe "into the soup." And he finds it rich indeed that banks that would have gone bust if not for massive government bailouts are still preaching to emerging nations the gospel of deregulating financial markets. "If there had not been those bailouts, these financial institutions would no longer exist. But having been bailed out, they now continue to think they're going to go back to business as usual."

Apparently they haven't heard that the party's over.

GREG PALAST

Greg Palast's reports on globalization are aired on BBC Television Newsnight and Air America's Ring of Fire. For more on the Battle of Seattle and the continuing fight for global justice, see our special section beginning on page 19, with contributions from John Nichols, Lori Wallach and Mike Dolan, as well as Anuradha Mittal at TheNation.com.

This issue of *The Nation* is a double issue. Our next issue goes to press December 16.
—The Editors

Noted.

COPENHAGEN CO-OP: Halting climate change will require global cooperation on an unprecedented scale. Reporting on international climate change negotiations is somewhat less daunting—but still, it's nice to have friends. That's why **The Nation** is partnering with **Mother Jones**, **Grist**, **The UpTake**, the **Center for Investigative Reporting**, **Planet Green** and **TreeHugger** to provide wall-to-wall coverage of the UN's Climate Change Conference, which kicks off in Copenhagen on December 7 and runs until December 18. For the duration of the conference, *Nation* correspondents **Naomi Klein**, **Mark Hertsgaard** and **Robert Eshelman** will be filing from Copenhagen on the latest diplomatic twists and activist actions, as well as providing analysis of the conference's politics. See their posts, dispatches and videos at thenation.com/section/envirnation. You'll also find content from our partner organizations, like dispatches from **Kate Sheppard** and **Chris Mooney** for *Mother Jones* and video from the crew at *The UpTake*, as well as a constantly updated feed of headlines from the collective's coverage.

LOST DECADE: Total number of nonfarm private-sector jobs as of October 1999, according to the **Bureau of Labor Statistics**: 109,487,000. Total number of nonfarm private-sector jobs as of October 2009: 108,401,000. Net difference: -1,086,000. Gain in US population from 1999 to 2009: 34,573,000.

UC GOES IMF: It was a sign that students were in danger of making a difference when, on December 1, the Academic Council of the University of California issued an open letter "to remind everyone of the limits of protest." Twelve days earlier, the UC Regents met at UCLA and voted to raise undergraduate tuition by 32 percent, setting off a wave of occupations. At UCLA hundreds of students locked arms to prevent the Regents from leaving the scene of the crime. Within hours, students occupied buildings on the university's Berkeley, Davis and Santa Cruz campuses. Dozens were arrested. "We can't sit down and let this happen," said UCLA

sophomore **Stephanie Anyanwu**. "We have to shake things up."

UC president **Mark Yudof** has done his best to paint the tuition hikes as inevitable, the painful but necessary outcome of California's budget crisis. But the state's once proud higher education system has been on a steady march toward privatization since well before the crisis began. Since 2003, says **Robert Meister**, a UC Santa Cruz professor who served on the UC Budget and Planning Committee, administrators have been pledging tuition revenue as collateral for construction bonds, borrowing money on the basis of students' ability to take out loans. This leaves California students in a situation like that faced by citizens of developing countries subject to IMF-imposed austerity programs, sacrificing their futures for the sake of someone else's profit. Neoliberalism comes full circle.

BEN EHRENREICH

UGANDA'S ANTIGAY PURGE: Maybe antigay pastor **Rick Warren** has been so busy living the purpose-driven life that he's forgotten some of the Ten Commandments, like the sixth: "Thou shalt not kill." Or maybe his application of biblical judgment is selective. Warren, who denounces abortion as "a holocaust," has refused to condemn a bill in Uganda's parliament that would punish anyone convicted of "aggravated homosexuality" with death. That includes serial offenders, HIV-positive people and those who use drugs or alcohol to facilitate gay sex. The bill also would decree life imprisonment for anyone found guilty of the "offense of homosexuality." And witnesses to an act of homosexuality who fail to report it to the police within twenty-four hours could face up to three years in prison.

If this sounds like something straight out of the Old Testament, it's because it essentially is. The "Anti-Homosexuality Bill" was introduced by Ugandan legislator **David Bahati**, a member of **The Family**, the fundamentalist Christian group whose devotees include Congressmen **Bart Stupak** and **Joe Pitts**, Senator **John Ensign** and South Carolina Governor **Mark Sanford**. According to an NPR interview with **Jeff Sharlet**, whose 2008 book documents *The Family's* influence in US politics, Bahati organizes Uganda's National Prayer Breakfast and runs some-

thing called the **African Youth Leadership Forum**, an alumni group associated with **Youth Corps**, part of *The Family's* **Cornerstone** leadership academy. Other backers of the bill include President **Yoweri Museveni**, who, according to Sharlet, has "a deep relationship [with *The Family*] that goes back more than two decades," and **James Nsaba Buturo**, the minister for ethics and integrity and another organizer of the National Prayer Breakfast. Buturo told the *Guardian* that the government hopes to pass the bill this year, even if it means withdrawing from the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. "We believe there are limits to human rights," he said.

According to a report by Inter Press Service, the idea for the bill was sparked by a March conference in Kampala featuring US Christian-right activists **Scott Lively**, head of Abiding Truth Ministries; **Don Schmierer**, a board member of Exodus International and an advocate of gay "reparative" therapy; and **Caleb Lee Brundidge**, a "therapist" with the International Healing Foundation. The seminar was organized by Ugandan pastor **Stephen Langa**, who afterward started a petition urging tougher antigay laws. In an e-mail to the *Guardian*, Lively subsequently denounced the bill, writing, "It is far too harsh and punitive."

And where does Warren fit into all this? He has been a longtime ally of pastor **Martin Ssempe**, who has made appearances at Warren's Saddleback Church and has actively campaigned for the bill. In the past, Ssempe publicly burned condoms and published the names of suspected homosexuals in newspapers. In the wake of Ssempe's involvement in the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, Warren said, "Ssempe does not represent me" and claims to have severed all ties to him in 2007. But when pressed by journalists to comment on the bill, Warren said, "It is not my personal calling as a pastor in America to comment or interfere in the political process of other nations"—a dodge he later repeated on *Meet the Press* when he said, "As a pastor, my job is to encourage, to support. I never take sides."

Warren, however, did take sides in 2008, when he endorsed California's Proposition 8. He also provided encouragement and support—at President Obama's inauguration.

RICHARD KIM

Eric Alterman

Saving Journalism (It's Not Academic)

As our journalistic world implodes, civic-minded folk naturally look to the academy as a potential savior, if not for newspapers per se, then for the collection and dissemination of the kind of news upon which the health of our democracy depends. In this spirit, the *Chronicle Review* recently published a symposium of nearly 17,000 words in which various experts and interested parties offered suggestions as to how universities might help fill the void left by the downsizing or outright disappearance of almost all of our most important journalistic institutions.

It's about time this conversation began. The newspaper business model is obsolete and unrepairable. Absent the possibility of profit, universities and foundations are just about the only places that have the funds, the interest and the potential skills to support both the watchdog and informational missions of American journalism. And yet, one can hardly be optimistic about the prospects for such an alliance. While journalism and academia share similar goals, they go about their respective tasks in a nearly contradictory fashion. In the first place, university faculties do tend to be politically liberal, even radical. (What conservatives falsely charge about journalists is actually true of academics.) But university administrations are decidedly conservative when it comes to their own interests. Anything that upsets the alumni—the funding base—is bound to be unpopular. Hence, any honest attempt to report the news in an unvarnished fashion is unlikely to find favor.

Intellectually, journalists and academics are also in conflict. Academics tend to know a great deal about their research topics but offer extremely narrow and carefully hedged conclusions; journalists, alas, take the opposite tack. Sanford Ungar, a journalist turned academic turned administrator, writes in the *Chronicle Review* of the unease he felt teaching journalism at a university where faculty in more traditional disciplines “got where they were by engaging in lofty research and careful thinking, while I seemed to them to have spent a good part of my life trying to distill wisdom from anecdotes. I knew that they secretly envied my willingness to draw conclusions on the basis of observations, documents, and interviews, but I didn’t dare tell them that I worried sometimes that my journalistic colleagues and I, for all our seeming cocksureness, were on frighteningly thin ice.”

I’ve shuttled between academic and journalistic institutions my entire adult life—as well as think-tank way stations in between—and I’ve frequently been fascinated by the fundamentally conflicted manner in which each profession treats the concept of truth. Academics generally test their truths with relevant counterarguments and footnoted references that can be examined by those with opposing views. Journalists, on the other hand, usually treat anything as true if someone in a position of ostensible authority is willing to say it, even anonymously (and if no one is going to sue

over it). The actual accuracy of anyone’s statement, particularly if that person is a public official, is often deemed irrelevant. If no evidence is available for an argument a journalist wishes to include in a story, then up pop weasel words such as “it seems” or “some claim” to enable its inclusion, no matter how shaky its foundation in reality. What’s more, too many journalists believe it is not within their job description to adjudicate between competing claims of truth. Sure, there are “two sides”—and only two sides—to every story, according to the rules of objectivity. But if both sides wish to deploy lies and other forms of deliberate deception for their own purposes, well, that’s somebody else’s problem.

In the main, with the help of my fact-checkers, I’ve tried to uphold academic rather than journalistic standards in my work. But one frequently runs into problems in this regard that go beyond one’s own laziness or lack thereof. First, the world moves too fast for such scrupulousness. Accurate information can take decades to acquire and examine, but politicians, corporations and individuals need to act in the moment. Just as justice delayed is justice denied, an awful lot of “news” loses its value when it ceases to be “new.”

No less problematic, however, is the cavalier attitude that some in the academy have demonstrated in recent decades toward easily observable truths. I attended a conference of intellectual historians at the CUNY Graduate Center recently, where the keynote, James Livingston of Rutgers University, was riffing on the alleged brilliance of the *Matrix* and *Terminator* films. Asked about Kathryn Bigelow’s *The Hurt Locker*, he denounced it as “a lie” because, he said, its portrayal of the American soldiers as decent human beings contradicted the message they received in training to lay aside their human feelings in the service of their military mission. I inquired from the audience whether it had any bearing on the issue that, while Livingston had never witnessed any bomb squad operations in Iraq, *The Hurt Locker*’s screenwriter, journalist Mark Boal, had written an eyewitness report on the bomb techs’ lives from the field. As Boal told Alissa Quart of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, “The milieu and the specifics of the job of being a bomb tech came out of my firsthand observation. There is no way I could have written that screen play without having been to Baghdad and had a nuts-and-bolts view of how bomb techs do their job. This was not public information. There was no other source material to draw on in terms of research.” Livingston responded to my question with an irrelevant story about someone he knew whose son had enlisted in the military. His concept of “truth” insofar as I could discern it was entirely ideological.

I’m not saying universities can’t help with the crisis in a variety of small but significant ways. They can and they should. But we cannot rely on them to replace the honest, disinterested, fact-based reporting structures disintegrating before our very eyes. And so the search continues. ■



THE SECRET US WAR IN PAKISTAN

AN INVESTIGATION BY
JEREMY SCAHILL

US Special Forces enlist Blackwater's help on covert operations.

At a covert forward operating base run by the US Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) in the Pakistani port city of Karachi, members of an elite division of Blackwater are at the center of a secret program in which they plan targeted assassinations of suspected Taliban and Al Qaeda operatives, “snatch and grabs” of high-value targets and other sensitive actions inside and outside Pakistan, an investigation by *The Nation* has found. The Blackwater operatives also assist in gathering intelligence and help direct a US military drone bombing campaign that runs parallel to the well-documented CIA predator strikes, according to a well-placed source within the US military intelligence apparatus.

The source, who has worked on covert US military programs for years, including in Afghanistan and Pakistan, has direct knowledge of the program. He spoke to *The Nation* on condition of anonymity because the program is classified. The source said that the program is so “compartmentalized” that senior figures within the Obama administration and the US military chain of command may not be aware of its existence.

The White House did not return calls or e-mail messages seeking comment for this story. Capt. John Kirby, the spokesman for Adm. Michael Mullen, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told *The Nation*, “We do not discuss current operations one way or the other, regardless of their nature.” A defense official, speaking on background, specifically denied that Blackwater performs work on drone strikes or intelligence for JSOC in Pakistan. “We don’t have any contracts to do that work for us. We don’t contract that kind of work out, period,” the official said. “There has not been, and is not now, contracts between JSOC and that organization for these types of services.”

Blackwater’s founder Erik Prince contradicted this statement in a recent interview, telling *Vanity Fair* that Blackwater works with US Special Forces in identifying targets and planning missions, citing an operation in Syria. The magazine also published a photo of a Blackwater base near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

The previously unreported program, the military intelligence

source said, is distinct from the CIA assassination program, which the agency’s director, Leon Panetta, announced he had canceled this past June. “This is a parallel operation to the CIA,” said the source. “They are two separate beasts.” The program puts Blackwater at the epicenter of a US military operation within the borders of a nation against which the United States has not declared war—knowledge that could further strain the already tense relations between the United States and Pakistan. In 2006 the United States and Pakistan struck a deal that authorized JSOC to enter Pakistan to hunt Osama bin Laden, with the understanding that Pakistan would deny it had given permission. Officially, the United States is not supposed to have any active military operations in the country.

Blackwater, which recently changed its name to Xe Services and US Training Center, denies that the company is operating in Pakistan. “Xe Services has only one employee in Pakistan performing construction oversight for the U.S. Government,” Blackwater spokesman Mark Corallo said in a statement to *The Nation*, adding that the company has “no other operations of any kind in Pakistan.”

A former senior executive at Blackwater confirmed the military intelligence source’s claim that the company is working in Pakistan for the CIA and JSOC, the premier counterterrorism and covert operations force within the military. He said that Blackwater is also working for the Pakistani government on a subcontract with an Islamabad-based security firm that puts US Blackwater operatives on the ground with Pakistani forces in counterterrorism operations, including house raids and border interdictions, in the North-West Frontier Province and elsewhere in Pakistan. This arrangement, the former executive said, allows the Pakistani government to use former US Special Operations forces who now work for Blackwater while denying that there is an official US military presence in the country. He also confirmed that Blackwater has a facility in Karachi and has personnel deployed elsewhere in Pakistan. The former executive spoke on condition of anonymity.

His account and that of the military intelligence source were borne out by a US military source who has knowledge of Special Forces actions in Pakistan and Afghanistan. When asked about Blackwater's covert work for JSOC in Pakistan, this source, who also asked for anonymity, told *The Nation*, "From my information that I have, that is absolutely correct," adding, "There's no question that's occurring."

"It wouldn't surprise me, because we've outsourced nearly everything," said Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, who was Secretary of State Colin Powell's chief of staff from 2002 to 2005, when told of Blackwater's role in Pakistan. Wilkerson said that during his time in the Bush administration, he saw the beginnings of Blackwater's involvement with the sensitive operations of the military and CIA. "Part of this, of course, is an attempt to get around the constraints the Congress has placed on DoD. If you don't have sufficient soldiers to do it, you hire civilians to do it."

The Counterterrorism Tag Team in Karachi

The covert JSOC program with Blackwater in Pakistan dates back to at least 2007, according to the military intelligence source. The current head of JSOC is Vice Adm. William McRaven, who took over the post from Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who headed JSOC from 2003 to 2008 before being named the top US commander in Afghanistan. Blackwater's presence in Pakistan is "not really visible, and that's why nobody has cracked down on it," said the source. Blackwater's operations in Pakistan, he said, are not done through State Department contracts or publicly identified Defense Department contracts: "It's Blackwater via JSOC, and it's a classified no-bid [contract] approved on a rolling basis." The source calls the main JSOC/Blackwater facility in Karachi "a very rudimentary operation. It's very bare bones, and that's the point."

Blackwater's work for JSOC in Karachi is coordinated out of a task force based at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, according to the military intelligence source. While JSOC technically runs the operations in Karachi, he said, it is largely staffed by former US Special Operations soldiers working for a division of Blackwater, once known as Blackwater SELECT, and intelligence analysts working for a Blackwater affiliate, Total Intelligence Solutions (TIS), which is owned by Erik Prince. The military source said that the name Blackwater SELECT may have been changed recently. Total Intelligence, which is run out of an office on the ninth floor of a building in the Ballston area of Arlington, Virginia, is staffed by former analysts and operatives from the CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), FBI and other agencies. It is modeled after the CIA's counterterrorism center. In Karachi, TIS runs a "media-scouring/open-source network," according to the source. Until recently, TIS was run by two former top CIA officials, Cofer Black and Robert Richer, both of whom have left the company. In Pakistan, Blackwater is not using either its original name or its new moniker, Xe Services, according to the former Blackwater executive. "They are running most of their work through TIS because the other two [names] have such a stain on them," he said. Corallo,

the Blackwater spokesman, denied that TIS or any other division or affiliate of Blackwater has any personnel in Pakistan.

The US military intelligence source said that Blackwater's classified contracts keep getting renewed at the request of JSOC. Blackwater, he said, is already so deeply entrenched that it has become a staple of US military operations in Pakistan. According to the former Blackwater executive, "The politics that go with the brand of BW is somewhat set aside because what you're doing is really one military guy to another."

One of the concerns raised by the military intelligence source is that some Blackwater personnel working on the classified JSOC contract are being given rolling security clearances above their approved clearances. Using Alternative Compartmentalized Control Measures (ACCMs), he said, the Blackwater personnel are granted clearance to a Special Access Program, the term for highly classified "black" operations. An ACCM allows Blackwater personnel access at "an ultra-exclusive level above top secret. That's exactly what it is: a circle of love." Blackwater, therefore, has access to "all source" reports that are culled in part from JSOC units in the field. "That's how a lot of things over the years have been conducted with contractors," said the source. "We have contractors that regularly see things that top policy-makers don't unless they ask."

According to the source, Blackwater has effectively marketed itself as a company whose operatives have "conducted lethal direct action missions and now, for a price, you can have your own planning cell. JSOC just ate that up." Blackwater's Pakistan JSOC contracts are secret and are therefore shielded from public oversight, he said. The source said he does not know when the arrangement with JSOC began, but a spinoff of Blackwater SELECT "was issued a no-bid contract for support to shooters for a JSOC Task Force, and they kept extending it." Some of the Blackwater personnel, he said, work undercover as aid workers. "Nobody even gives them a second thought."

The Blackwater/JSOC Karachi operation is referred to as "Qatar cubed," in reference to the US forward operating base in Qatar that served as the hub for the planning and implementation of the US invasion of Iraq, according to the military intelligence source. "This is supposed to be the brave new world," he said. "This is the Jamestown of the new millennium, and it's meant to be a lily pad. You can jump off to Uzbekistan, you can jump back over the border, you can jump sideways, you can jump northwest. It's strategically located so that they can get their people wherever they have to without having to wrangle with the military chain of command in Afghanistan, which is convoluted. They don't have to deal with that, because they're operating under a classified mandate."

In addition to planning drone strikes and operations against suspected Al Qaeda and Taliban forces in Pakistan for both JSOC and the CIA, the Blackwater team in Karachi also helps plan missions for JSOC in Uzbekistan against the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, according to the military intelligence source. Blackwater does not carry out the operations, he said, which are executed on the ground by JSOC forces. "That piqued my curiosity and really worries me, because I don't know if you noticed but I was never told we are at war with Uzbekistan," he said. "So, did I miss something? Did Rumsfeld come back into power?"

Jeremy Scabill, Puffin Foundation fellow at The Nation Institute, is the author of Blackwater: The World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army.

SILENCE FREE SPEECH

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Pakistan's Military Contracting Maze

Blackwater, according to the military intelligence source, is not doing the actual killing as part of its work in Pakistan. "The SELECT personnel are not going into places with private aircraft and going after targets," he said. "It's not like Blackwater SELECT people are running around assassinating people." Instead, US Special Forces teams carry out the plans developed in part by Blackwater. The military intelligence source drew a distinction between the Blackwater operatives who work for the State Department, which he calls "Blackwater Vanilla," and the seasoned Special Forces veterans who work on the JSOC program. "Good or bad, there's a small number of people who know how to pull off an operation like that. That's probably a good thing," said the source. "It's the Blackwater SELECT people that have and continue to plan these types of operations, because they're the only people that know how, and they went where the money was. It's not trigger-happy fucks, like some of the PSD [Personal Security Detail] guys. These are not people that believe that Barack Obama is a socialist; these are not people that kill innocent civilians. They're very good at what they do."

The former Blackwater executive, when asked for confirmation that Blackwater forces were not actively killing people in Pakistan, said, "That's not entirely accurate." While he concurred with the military intelligence source's description of the JSOC and CIA programs, he pointed to another role Blackwater is allegedly playing in Pakistan, not for the US government but for Islamabad. According to the executive, Blackwater works on a subcontract for Kestral Logistics, a Pakistani firm that specializes in military logistical support, private security and intelligence consulting. It is staffed with former high-ranking Pakistani army and government officials. Kestral's main offices are in Pakistan, but it also has branches in several other countries.

A spokesperson for the State Department's Directorate of Defense Trade Controls (DDTC), which is responsible for issuing licenses to US firms to provide defense-related services to foreign governments or entities, would neither confirm nor deny for *The Nation* that Blackwater has a license to work in Pakistan or to work with Kestral. "We cannot help you," said department spokesman David McKeeby after checking with the relevant DDTC officials. "You'll have to contact the companies directly." Blackwater's Corallo said the company has "no operations of any kind" in Pakistan other than the one employee working for the DoD. Kestral did not respond to inquiries from *The Nation*.

According to federal lobbying records, Kestral recently hired a former assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, Roger Noriega, who served in that post from 2003 to 2005, to lobby the government, including the State Department, USAID and Congress, on foreign affairs issues "regarding [Kestral's] capabilities to carry out activities of interest to the United States." Noriega was hired through his firm, Vision Americas, which he runs with Christina Rocca, a former CIA official who served as assistant secretary of state for South Asian affairs from 2001 to 2006 and helped shape US policy on Pakistan. In October Kestral paid Vision Americas \$15,000 and paid a Vision Americas-affiliated firm, Firecreek Ltd., an equal amount to lobby on defense and foreign policy issues.

For years Kestral has done a robust business in defense

logistics with the Pakistani government and other nations, as well as with top US defense companies. Blackwater owner Erik Prince is close with Kestral CEO Liaquat Ali Baig, according to the former Blackwater executive. "Ali and Erik have a pretty close relationship," he said. "They've met many times and struck a deal, and they [offer] mutual support for one another." Working with Kestral, he said, Blackwater has provided convoy security for Defense Department shipments destined for Afghanistan that would arrive in the port at Karachi. Blackwater, according to the former executive, would guard the supplies as they were transported overland from Karachi to Peshawar and then west through the Torkham border crossing, the most important supply route for the US military in Afghanistan.

According to the former executive, Blackwater operatives also integrate with Kestral's forces in sensitive counterterrorism operations in the North-West Frontier Province, where they work in conjunction with the Pakistani Interior Ministry's paramilitary force, known as the Frontier Corps (alternately referred to as "frontier scouts"). The Blackwater personnel are technically advisers, the former executive said, but the line often gets blurred in the field. Blackwater "is providing the actual guidance on how to do [counterterrorism operations] and Kestral's folks are carrying a lot of them out, but they're having the guidance and the overwatch from some BW guys that will actually go out with the teams when they're executing the job," he said. "You can see how that can lead to other things in the border areas." He said that when Blackwater personnel are out with the Pakistani teams, sometimes its men engage in operations against suspected terrorists. "You've got BW guys that are assisting... and they're all going to want to go on the jobs—so they're going to go with them," he said. "So, the things that you're seeing in the news about how this Pakistani military group came in and raided this house or did this or did that—in some of those cases, you're going to have Western folks that are right there at the house, if not in the house." Blackwater, he said, is paid by the Pakistani government through Kestral for consulting services. "That gives the Pakistani government the cover to say, 'Hey, no, we don't have any Westerners doing this. It's all local and our people are doing it.' But it gets them the expertise that Westerners provide for [counterterrorism]-related work."

The military intelligence source confirmed that Blackwater works with the Frontier Corps, saying, "There's no real oversight. It's not really on people's radar screen."

In October, in response to Pakistani news reports that a Kestral warehouse in Islamabad was being used to store heavy weapons for Blackwater, the US Embassy in Pakistan released a statement denying the weapons were being used by "a private American security contractor." The statement said, "Kestral Logistics is a private logistics company that handles the importation of equipment and supplies provided by the United States to the Government of Pakistan. All of the equipment and supplies were imported at the request of the Government of Pakistan, which also certified the shipments."

Who Is Behind the Drone Attacks?

Since President Obama was inaugurated, the United States has expanded drone bombing raids in Pakistan. Obama first

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About Your Professor

Dr. Malcolm David Eckel is Associate Professor of Religion at Boston University. He earned his Masters in Theology at Oxford and Ph.D. in the study of comparative religion at Harvard. In 1998, Professor Eckel received the Metcalf Award for Teaching Excellence, his university's highest award for teaching.

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ordered a drone strike against targets in North and South Waziristan on January 23, and the strikes have been conducted consistently ever since. The Obama administration has now surpassed the number of Bush-era strikes in Pakistan and has faced fierce criticism from Pakistan and some US lawmakers over civilian deaths. A drone attack in June killed as many as sixty people attending a Taliban funeral.

In August, the *New York Times* reported that Blackwater works for the CIA at "hidden bases in Pakistan and Afghanistan, where the company's contractors assemble and load Hellfire missiles and 500-pound laser-guided bombs on remotely piloted Predator aircraft." In February, the *Times* of London obtained a satellite image of a secret CIA airbase in Shamsi, in Pakistan's southwestern province of Baluchistan, showing three drone aircraft. The *New York Times* also reported that the agency uses a secret base in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, to strike in Pakistan.

The military intelligence source said that the drone strike that reportedly killed Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud, his wife and his bodyguards in Waziristan in August was a CIA strike, but that many others attributed in media reports to the CIA are actually JSOC strikes. "Some of these strikes are attributed to OGA [Other Government Agency, intelligence parlance for the CIA], but in reality it's JSOC and its parallel program of UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles] because they also have access to UAVs. So when you see some of these hits, especially the ones with high civilian casualties, those are almost always JSOC strikes." The Pentagon has stated bluntly, "There are no US military strike operations being conducted in Pakistan."

The military intelligence source also confirmed that Blackwater continues to work for the CIA on its drone bombing program in Pakistan, as previously reported in the *New York Times*, but added, "It's Blackwater running the program for both CIA and JSOC." When civilians are killed, he said, "people go, 'Oh, it's the CIA doing crazy shit again unchecked.' Well, at least 50 percent of the time, that's JSOC [hitting] somebody they've identified through HUMINT [human intelligence] or they've culled the intelligence themselves or it's been shared with them and they take that person out and that's how it works."

The military intelligence source explained that the CIA operations are subject to Congressional oversight, unlike the parallel JSOC bombings. "Targeted killings are not the most popular thing in town right now, and the CIA knows that," he said. "Contractors and especially JSOC personnel working under a classified mandate are not [overseen by Congress], so they just don't care. If there's one person they're going after and there's thirty-four people in the building, thirty-five people are going to die. That's the mentality." He added, "They're not accountable to anybody, and they know that. It's an open secret, but what are you going to do, shut down JSOC?"

In addition to working on covert action planning and drone strikes, Blackwater SELECT also provides private guards to perform the sensitive task of security for secret US drone bases, JSOC camps and DIA camps inside Pakistan, according to the military intelligence source.

Mosharraf Zaidi, a well-known Pakistani journalist who has served as a consultant for the United Nations and European Union in Pakistan and Afghanistan, says that the Blackwater/

JSOC program raises serious questions about the norms of international relations. “The immediate question is, How do you define the active pursuit of military objectives in a country with which not only have you not declared war but that is supposedly a frontline non-NATO ally in the US struggle to contain extremist violence coming out of Afghanistan and the border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan?” asks Zaidi, who is currently a columnist for the *News*, the biggest English-language daily in Pakistan. “Let’s forget Blackwater for a second. What this is confirming is that there are US military operations in Pakistan that aren’t about logistics or getting food to Bagram, that are actually about the exercise of physical violence, physical force, inside Pakistani territory.”

JSOC: Rumsfeld and Cheney’s Extra Special Force

Colonel Wilkerson said that he is concerned that with General McChrystal’s elevation as the military commander of the war in Afghanistan—which is increasingly seeping into Pakistan—there is a concomitant rise in JSOC’s influence within the military structure. “I don’t see how you can escape that; it’s just a matter of the way the authority flows and the power flows, and it’s inevitable, I think,” Wilkerson told *The Nation*. He added, “I’m alarmed when I see execute orders and combat orders that go out saying that the supporting force is Central Command and the supported force is Special Operations Command,” under which JSOC operates. “That’s backward. But that’s essentially what we have today.”

From 2003 to 2008 McChrystal headed JSOC, which is headquartered at Pope Air Force Base and Fort Bragg in North Carolina, where Blackwater’s 7,000-acre operating base is also situated. JSOC controls the Army’s Delta Force, the Navy’s SEAL Team 6, as well as the Army’s 75th Ranger Regiment and 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, and the Air Force’s 24th Special Tactics Squadron. JSOC performs strike operations, reconnaissance in denied areas and special intelligence missions. Blackwater, founded by former Navy SEALs, employs scores of veteran Special Forces operators—which several former military officials pointed to as the basis for Blackwater’s alleged contracts with JSOC.

Since 9/11, many top-level Special Forces veterans have taken up employment with private firms, where they can make more money doing the same work they did in uniform. “The Blackwater individuals have the experience. A lot of these individuals are retired military, and they’ve been around twenty to thirty years and have experience that the younger Green Beret guys don’t,” said retired Army Lt. Col. Jeffrey Addicott, a well-connected military lawyer who served as senior legal counsel for Army Special Forces. “They’re known entities. Everybody knows who they are, what their capabilities are, and they’ve got the experience. They’re very valuable.”

“They make much more money being the smarts of these operations, planning hits in various countries and basing it off their experience in Chechnya, Bosnia, Somalia, Ethiopia,” said the military intelligence source. “They were there for all of these things; they know what the hell they’re talking about. And JSOC has unfortunately lost the institutional capability to plan within, so they hire back people that used to work for them and had

already planned and executed these [types of] operations. They hired back people that jumped over to Blackwater SELECT and then pay them exorbitant amounts of money to plan future operations. It’s a ridiculous revolving door.”

While JSOC has long played a central role in US counterterrorism and covert operations, military and civilian officials who worked at the Defense and State departments during the Bush administration described in interviews with *The Nation* an extremely cozy relationship that developed between the executive branch (primarily through Vice President Cheney and Defense Secretary Rumsfeld) and JSOC. During the Bush era, Special Forces turned into a virtual stand-alone operation that acted outside the military chain of command and in direct coordination with the White House. In the Bush years, it was largely General McChrystal who ran JSOC. “What I was seeing was the development of what I would later see in Iraq and Afghanistan, where Special Operations forces would operate in both theaters without the conventional commander even knowing what they were doing,” said Colonel Wilkerson. “That’s dangerous, that’s very dangerous. You have all kinds of mess when you don’t tell the theater commander what you’re doing.”

Wilkerson said that almost immediately after assuming his role at the State Department under Colin Powell, he saw JSOC being politicized and developing a close relationship with the executive branch. This began, he said, after his first Delta Force briefing at Fort Bragg. “I think Cheney and Rumsfeld went directly into JSOC. I think they went into JSOC at times, perhaps most frequently, without the SOCOM [Special Operations] commander at the time even knowing it. The receptivity in JSOC was quite good,” said Wilkerson. “I think Cheney was actually giving McChrystal instructions, and McChrystal was asking him for instructions.” He said the relationship between JSOC and Cheney and Rumsfeld “built up initially because Rumsfeld didn’t get the responsiveness. He didn’t get the can-do kind of attitude out of the SOCOM commander, and so he cut him out. At that point you had JSOC operating as an extension of the [administration] doing things the executive branch—read, Cheney and Rumsfeld—wanted it to do. This would be more or less *carte blanche*. You need to do it, do it. It was very alarming for me as a conventional soldier.”

Wilkerson said the JSOC teams caused diplomatic problems for the United States across the globe. “When these teams started hitting capital cities and other places all around the world, [Rumsfeld] didn’t tell the State Department either. The only way we found out about it is our ambassadors started to call us and say, ‘Who the hell are these six-foot-four white males with eighteen-inch biceps walking around our capital cities?’ So we discovered this, we discovered one in South America, for example, because he actually murdered a taxi driver, and we had to get him out of there real quick. We rendered him—we rendered him home.”

Rumsfeld and Cheney also created the Strategic Support Branch (SSB), which pulled intelligence resources from the DIA and the CIA for use in JSOC operations. The SSB was created using “reprogrammed” funds “without explicit Congressional authority or appropriation,” according to the *Washington Post*. The SSB operated outside the military chain of command and circumvented the CIA’s authority on clandestine operations.

Under US law, the Defense Department is required to report all deployment orders to Congress. But guidelines issued in January 2005 by former Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence Stephen Cambone stated that Special Operations forces may “conduct clandestine HUMINT operations...before publication” of a deployment order. This effectively gave Rumsfeld unilateral control over clandestine operations.

The military intelligence source said that when Rumsfeld was defense secretary, JSOC was deployed to commit some of the “darkest acts,” in part to keep them concealed from Congress. “They knew they could act extralegally and nothing would happen because (a) it was sanctioned by DoD at the highest levels, and (b) who was going to stop them? They were preparing the battlefield, which was on all of the PowerPoints: ‘Preparing the Battlefield,’” said the source.

The significance of the flexibility of JSOC’s operations inside Pakistan versus the CIA’s is best summed up by Senator Dianne Feinstein, chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. “Every single intelligence operation and covert action must be briefed to the Congress,” she said. “If they are not, that is a violation of the law.”

Blackwater: Company Non Grata in Pakistan

For months, the Pakistani media have been flooded with stories about Blackwater’s alleged growing presence in the country. For the most part, these stories have been ignored by the US press and denounced as lies or propaganda by US officials in Pakistan. The US ambassador to Pakistan, Anne Patterson, has denied Blackwater’s presence in the country, stating bluntly in September, “Blackwater is not operating in Pakistan.” [Editor’s note: After this article was posted online on November 23, the embassy issued a “correction” declaring the allegations “completely false” and stating, “There is no secret operating base in Karachi or anywhere else in Pakistan being run, occupied, or otherwise operated by U.S. military personnel of any command or organization. The article’s assertions about U.S. government collusion with Blackwater or any other contracting firm are equally baseless and false.”]

In her trip to Pakistan in October, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton dodged questions from the Pakistani press about Blackwater’s rumored Pakistani operations. Pakistan’s interior minister, Rehman Malik, said on November 21 he will resign if Blackwater is found operating anywhere in Pakistan. Although many of the stories about Blackwater in Pakistan appear to be vastly exaggerated, Pakistanis have good reason to be concerned about Blackwater’s operations in their country. It is an open secret in Washington and Islamabad that Blackwater has been a central part of the wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan and that the company has been involved—almost from the beginning of the “war on terror”—with clandestine US operations.

The *Christian Science Monitor* recently reported that Blackwater “provides security for a US-backed aid project” in Peshawar, suggesting the company may be based out of the Pearl Continental, a luxury hotel the United States reportedly is considering purchasing to use as a consulate in the city. “We have no contracts in Pakistan,” Blackwater spokeswoman Stacey

DeLuke said recently. “We’ve been blamed for all that has gone wrong in Peshawar, none of which is true, since we have absolutely no presence there.”

In September, the Pakistani press covered a report on Blackwater allegedly submitted by Pakistan’s intelligence agencies to the interior ministry. In the report, the intelligence agencies reportedly allege that Blackwater was provided houses by a federal minister who is also helping it clear shipments of weapons and vehicles through Karachi’s Port Qasim on the coast of the Arabian Sea. The military intelligence source did not confirm this but did say, “The port jives because they have a lot of [former] SEALs and they would revert to what they know: the ocean, instead of flying stuff in.”

The Nation cannot independently confirm these allegations and has not seen the Pakistani intelligence report. But according to Pakistani press coverage, the intelligence report also said Blackwater has acquired “bungalows” in the Defense Housing Authority in the city. According to the DHA website, it is a large residential estate originally established “for the welfare of the serving and retired officers of the Armed Forces of Pakistan.” Its motto is: “Home for Defenders.” The report alleges that Blackwater is receiving help from local government officials in Karachi and is using vehicles with license plates traditionally assigned to members of the national and provincial assemblies, meaning local law enforcement will not stop them.

The use of private companies like Blackwater for sensitive operations such as drone strikes or other covert work undoubtedly comes with the benefit of plausible deniability that places an additional barrier in an already deeply flawed system of accountability. When things go wrong, it’s the contractors’ fault, not the government’s. But the widespread use of contractors also raises serious legal questions, particularly when they are a part of lethal covert actions. “We are using contractors for things that in the past might have been considered to be a violation of the Geneva Convention,” said Colonel Addicott, who now runs the Center for Terrorism Law at St. Mary’s University School of Law, in San Antonio. “In my opinion, we have pressed the envelope to the breaking limit, and it’s almost a fiction that these guys are not in offensive military operations.” Addicott added, “If we were subjected to the International Criminal Court, some of these guys could easily be picked up, charged with war crimes and put on trial. That’s one of the reasons we’re not members of the International Criminal Court.”

If there is one quality that has defined Blackwater over the past decade, it is the ability to survive against the odds while reinventing and rebranding itself. That is most evident in Afghanistan, where the company continues to work for the US military, the CIA and the State Department despite intense criticism and almost weekly scandals. Blackwater’s alleged Pakistan operations, said the military intelligence source, are indicative of its new frontier. “Having learned its lessons after the private security contracting fiasco in Iraq, Blackwater has shifted its operational focus to two venues: protecting things that are in danger and anticipating other places we’re going to go as a nation that are dangerous,” he said. “It’s as simple as that.” ■

The Spirit of Seattle Lives On

In dozens of recent Congressional contests, fair traders have replaced free traders.

by JOHN NICHOLS



Two months after we had marveled at the convergence of labor, farm, environmental and human rights activists outside the 1999 World Trade Organization ministerial in Seattle, Paul Wellstone and I were riding along the back roads of New Hampshire. The Minnesota senator was trying to get liberals excited about Bill Bradley's 2000 Democratic presidential bid. "Do

you wish you were running?" I asked Wellstone. It was a question we had danced around before. This time he surprised me by answering that yes, he did sort of wish he was in the running. "You know why?" he asked. "Because I'd like to get into those debates and just say, 'Seattle!'"

"A lot of what was captured in Seattle—the questions about the changing face of the global economy—is not going away. These are issues that are going to have to be addressed," said Wellstone, who dared on that cold winter night almost a decade ago to imagine how the coalitions that challenged the corporate agenda in Seattle might develop into a transformational movement. "A hundred years ago, the challenge was to civilize the national economy. There were powerful interests working to maintain the status quo—as there are today. But a great populist and progressive movement sprang up, and that movement gave us anti-trust laws and safe food regulations, child labor laws, the forty-hour workweek and so many of the other policies we take for granted today. Now what you have is another transformation—a transition to a global economy. Now the demand is to civilize the global economy. And just as it was at the start of the last century, that demand is coming from the people. It's only a matter of time before the political leaders have to respond."

Wellstone was right on most counts. But the senator, whose 2002 death would rob progressives of a visionary elected leader, was getting ahead of himself. We have seen Seattle marchers elected to powerful positions. We have heard the calls sounded in Seattle for fair trade, corporate accountability, transparency in global deal-making and international solidarity incorporated into the rhetoric of Democratic presidential candidates. Yet we are far, far short of the transformation Wellstone imagined. So it is fair to ask the question uttered just three days after the Battle of Seattle by Sherrod Brown, a marcher who is now a senator: "What did the protesters at Seattle accomplish?"

In the immediate aftermath of the disruption of the WTO's plans, it seemed as if much—perhaps even another world—was possible. President Clinton incorporated references to the battle into an unexpectedly reflective address at the World Economic Forum in Davos, where he told the assembled politicians, CEOs and trade experts that "trade can no longer be the private province of politicians, CEOs and trade experts." But that message never really took hold in the 2000 presidential race, except to the extent that Green Party nominee Ralph Nader shouted

about it from the sidelines. Once George W. Bush assumed the presidency—and especially after 9/11 intervened to make his narrow worldview dominant—it became even harder to introduce the concept that "another world is possible" into debates on trade, development, food and agriculture, and militarism.

Top Democrats were almost as disinclined as Republicans to break with the free-trade consensus. Dennis Kucinich might have bid for the Democratic nomination with a "Seattle!" message, but John Kerry did not take those themes into electoral combat with corporate Republicans.

Below the leadership level, however, something was changing. Democrats who took up trade issues began to win elections—lots of them. And these were not simplistic protectionists; they were savvy internationalists who could debate economists and trade representatives about what was wrong with NAFTA, CAFTA (the Central American Free Trade Agreement, which a GOP-controlled Congress had approved in 2005) and massive trade deficits.

Frustration with Bush's wars and lawlessness may have energized the base. But anger at his trade policies expanded that base enough to win elections. If there was one constant in the many wins that shifted Congress to Democratic control in 2006 and to overwhelmingly Democratic control in '08, it was the replacement of free traders with fair traders—which played out in more than seventy contests during those two election cycles. Even if some Democratic presidential candidates and strategists were reticent about taking up the theme that corporate-sponsored free trade was bad for workers, farmers, communities and the environment, Democrats who were defeating GOP representatives and senators "got it." Indeed, after the 2006 election, thirty-nine freshman members signed a letter reminding party leaders, "Vital to our electoral successes was our ability to take a vocal stand against the Administration's misguided trade agenda."

By 2008, when polls revealed that almost 80 percent of Americans had qualms about the free-trade regimen's impact on workers, it seemed as if Wellstone's hope might finally be realized. As they battled for blue-collar votes, both leading candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination started speaking in Seattle tongues about the importance of "fair trade." Barack Obama had the upper hand, as Hillary Clinton's last name is associated with NAFTA. Speaking at a Wisconsin factory in February 2008, Obama distanced himself not just from Bush Republicans but from Clinton Democrats when he condemned "a Washington where decades of trade deals like NAFTA and China have been signed with plenty of protections for corporations and their profits, but none for our environment or our workers, who've seen factories shut their doors and millions of jobs disappear." Unfortunately, by the time he secured the nomination, Obama was backtracking, telling *Fortune* that his anti-NAFTA rhetoric had been "overheated and amplified." Once elected, Obama, always more of a cautious centrist on economics than his supporters hoped or his critics feared, took counsel from

free-trade fabulists like Austan Goolsbee and Rahm Emanuel. With his appointments of Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner and Trade Representative Ron Kirk, the new president quickly signaled that there would be no immediate change in Washington's approach to trade or to the raft of issues associated with it.

To be sure, Obama understands globalization in ways that Bush did not, and he has taken some steps to beef up enforcement of trade provisions designed to protect American industries and workers. But when Obama pledged in November to fight for Congressional approval of a flawed accord with South Korea, fair traders were aghast. "The last thing we need to do when we're looking at this double-digit unemployment is another bad trade deal," said Representative Phil Hare, a 2006 winner and a leader of the House Trade Working Group.

Hare and Democrat Mike Michaud, along with Senator Sherrod Brown, have led efforts to move supporters of fair trade from the defensive position of opposing bad deals to the offensive one of promoting legislation like the Trade Reform, Accountability, Development, and Employment (TRADE) Act. That bill proposes a review of existing agreements and renegotiation of those that fail to establish a "floor of decency" strong enough to support fair treatment of workers, basic environmental standards, food safety protections and financial regulations that prevent dangerous speculation. So far, 128 House members have signed on, including a significant number of conservative Blue Dogs and centrist New Democrats. Unfortunately, the White House is less than enthusiastic about proposals that could redefine not just the trade debate but broader discussions about jobs and the economy. Equally unfortunate has been the tendency of some labor and environmental groups to cooperate with a friendly administration by softening their advocacy on trade. The result is a limbo where the need for new approaches is recognized but there is insufficient impetus to pursue them.

This frustrates Hare, a former textile union leader who has become an outspoken critic of the way trade agreements neglect labor rights in Latin America and Asia. "There's still a disconnect in our party, especially at the top, when it comes to trade and issues related to it," he says. "They think you have to choose between free trade and no trade. We're not saying we don't want trade. What we're saying is, Don't give us just any deal. Give us a good deal. Give us a good deal for workers in the United States and for workers in Colombia and Korea. Give us a good deal for the environment. Give us a good deal for human rights."

Hare's words highlight the way the lessons of Seattle have resonated in our politics. It's still possible to find a knee-jerk protectionist in Congress, even in the Democratic caucus. But most Democrats who focus on trade—and even a few enlightened Republicans, like Walter Jones—understand what Wellstone understood. The trade fights of the future are not between US workers and Koreans; they are between a corporate agenda that encourages race-to-the-bottom profiteering and a popular vision of fair trade that respects workers, farmers, consumers and citizens in all countries. The electoral results of 2006 and '08 tell us that Wellstone was right: Americans are ready and willing to support a politics that seeks to civilize the global economy. Now, if we could just get a Democratic president to work with a Democratic Congress to offer them that politics...

OBAMA'S CHOICE

by LORI WALLACH



he spectacular 1999 protests that shut down the WTO ministerial in Seattle were transformational. The demonstrations abruptly upended conventional wisdom by demonstrating that American citizens opposed the globalization regime that the government and corporations were pushing on the world. And the revolution in the Seattle negotiating suites was as dramatic as the one in the streets: a plan for massive expansion of the WTO's scope and powers was defeated. A new generation of activists experienced the power and joy of winning.

A decade later—and despite endless efforts by the world's most powerful corporations and governments—there is no WTO expansion. But there is also no WTO turnaround.

Americans now have a critical role to play in determining whether the Battle of Seattle, and the decade of worldwide campaigning for global justice that followed it, will deliver real change. At stake is whether the Obama administration will lead an effort to modernize the rules of the global economy or continue the Bush/Clinton/Bush agenda, which has fostered devastating economic, food and climate crises.

The WTO ministerial following Seattle was scheduled for Qatar. There, two months after the 9/11 terror attacks, the Bush administration exploited the shaky global political context to coerce countries into launching the "Doha Round." This was the same WTO expansion agenda rejected in Seattle. Two years later, the Cancún ministerial collapsed, as officials inside reiterated opposition to WTO expansion while protesters outside filled the streets. With the viability of the WTO itself now at stake, US and European officials agreed to jettison some extreme elements of their agenda. But what remained was still extremely dangerous. Thanks to an enormous amount of internationally coordinated, country-by-country lobbying and mass protest starting a year before the Seattle ministerial and continuing ever since, talks have remained largely deadlocked.

For the past four years, WTO expansion proponents have been afraid to call another Doha Round negotiating ministerial. They know that unless they can announce a done deal, expansion will be dead, with potentially fatal consequences for the WTO's legitimacy. But contrary to press reports that the global economic crisis has ended the era of market fundamentalism, 153 member countries remain bound to a full complement of neoliberal policies required by the existing WTO rules, established in 1995. And even though numerous governments have been replaced with ones that better represent their citizens' interests, the WTO stands as a barrier against change.

Hundreds of millions continue to suffer daily the consequences of this regime. The number of people suffering from extreme poverty in poor countries has increased since the WTO was established; so has hunger, with two-thirds of developing countries now net importers of food. In the United States 5 million manufacturing workers have lost their jobs, which, along with increased offshoring of high-end service-sector jobs, has con-

tributed to declining wages. Meanwhile, US families have been flooded with unsafe imported food and products, many bearing the names of US firms that use their WTO privileges to relocate production to countries where they can exploit sweatshop labor and avoid health, safety and environmental regulation.

The WTO is called a trade agreement, but it is better understood as a powerful delivery mechanism for a package of neoliberal policies, many unrelated to trade, that provide new rights for capital and new constraints on governments' abilities to ensure their populations' well-being. Signatory countries are obliged to conform their service-sector, investment and development, food, government procurement, intellectual-property, environmental and safety policies to constraints enumerated in the seventeen agreements the WTO enforces. Domestic policies that violate these agreements can be challenged in WTO tribunals, with trade sanctions imposed until countries comply with WTO dictates. Almost 90 percent of challenged policies have been found to violate the rules. Now a mere threat of challenge often results in initiatives being chilled, as occurred earlier this year when provisions in Obama's stimulus package ensuring that our tax dollars created jobs for Americans were weakened to comply with the WTO's ban on procurement policies favoring local workers, goods and services.

Replacing this retrograde regime of global governance is our current challenge—and the growing evidence of its devastation provides fertile ground. The financial crisis has generated calls for re-regulation of the economy from previously unimaginable quarters. Yet simultaneously, the usual bloc of corporations, along with their government allies, are intensifying, shock doctrine-style, their push for WTO expansion.

Contrary to press reports, the current WTO deadlock is not premised on mercantile squabbles over specific issues. Rather, there is a fundamental divide over the future course of global economic governance. A small but extremely powerful bloc is pushing for more of the same, while the majority is demanding a rewrite of existing terms. Yet no countries have been willing to risk responsibility for formally ending the Doha Round.

American negotiators went to a WTO "housekeeping" ministerial in Geneva—called ten years to the day after Seattle—where discussion of the Doha Round was noticeably absent from the official agenda. But on the sidelines, and before and after it at WTO headquarters, negotiations have continued. The agenda—set before the economic crisis—would impose more financial deregulation, curtailing countries' control of their energy and other policies needed to redress the climate crisis and further concentrating corporate control of food production.

The Obama administration's default position has been to support the Doha Round's conclusion, with the old Bush policy still standing in as the US position. However, this reflects a lack of attention rather than carefully considered policy. Bush's 2001 Doha Round agenda fundamentally conflicts with the Obama administration's domestic priorities—existing WTO rules must be altered for Obama to deliver on the goals that will determine his success as a president. This includes eliminating WTO limits on how tax dollars may be spent to create US jobs and stimulate the economy, and removing existing financial deregulation requirements that conflict with key proposals now before Congress

to stabilize the economy. By highlighting these conflicts—and organizing our demands for change—global justice activists can create an imperative to turn around the WTO.

Indeed, Obama made impressive reform commitments during the 2008 campaign, repeatedly pledging to change the rules of the global economy to work for all Americans, not just special interests, including specific WTO changes. And early attempts by Obama's trade representative, former nuclear industry lobbyist Ron Kirk, to push through Congress Bush's leftover NAFTA expansion agreements with Colombia and Panama were derailed by the *White House*, which recognized the political consequences of such folly. But corporate interests are putting enormous pressure on Obama to continue the failed model. Newspaper editorials slam him as a protectionist every time he questions the status quo. Plus, there are no high-level reform proponents inside the administration, where Clinton-era personnel involved in creating this mess lead the economic team.

On the other hand, in Congress a powerful bloc has sponsored the TRADE Act, legislation that calls for renegotiation of the WTO—and NAFTA and CAFTA—while setting out a new model for trade agreements and a new process to negotiate them. It has emerged as the leading instrument to implement the change demanded by many and articulated by Obama. It is also a powerful tool around which US activists have been organizing that reinforces the demand by most WTO member countries since Seattle to focus on fixing the existing damaging rules.

Global justice activists worldwide have turned to permanent campaigning at home to make their governments better represent their interests. Press reports from the Geneva ministerial may compare the numbers on the streets in Geneva with those in Seattle rather than focusing on the results measured by the deadlock on WTO expansion that activists have delivered by various means.

Officials at the Geneva ministerial faced constant reminders of expectations, with massive farmer rallies in India, fisher protests in Asia and union demonstrations in capitals worldwide. More than 140 events celebrating the Seattle anniversary and calling for WTO turnaround occurred across the United States. And a decade of campaigning has transformed the US political dynamics for the ongoing Battle After Seattle. Since 2006 more than seventy Congressional candidates have been elected on platforms advocating replacement of the NAFTA-WTO model, replacing incumbents supporting the status quo.

As Americans committed to global justice, we must present the choice facing Obama in the stark terms it represents. Will he stand with the majority of Americans and implement his campaign commitments to change the rules of the global economy so they no longer "favor the few rather than the many"? Or will he side with the banksters and other global elites and fall back into the failed status quo? To repeat a popular refrain from the streets of Seattle: the whole world is watching.

Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch division, is co-author of Whose Trade Organization? Public Citizen, a lead organizer of the 1999 Seattle protests, has joined the Steelworkers and others to launch WTOturnaround.org, where activists can sign a petition to President Obama urging him to turn around the WTO.

LABOR'S LEGACY

by MIKE DOLAN



nyone who was in Seattle ten years ago remembers the dramatic moment when the American labor movement joined the battle for fair trade—along with faith groups and activists for the environment, family farms, human rights and consumers. There we were at Fourth and Stewart, watching the police try to break through the lockdown at the Seattle convention center as 20,000 labor union members approached the battle zone. The unions marched behind banners, flying their colors like the cavalry. Then the march marshals, in red vests with megaphones, turned the parade around. That wasn't supposed to happen—the unions were supposed to walk up to the convention center and, on a secret cue, sit on the ground and continue chanting. Perhaps someone in charge thought the melee in the streets was too dangerous.

So the rest of us used our own megaphones: "Join us, c'mon! Now! You!" Some did, then more. The rank and file broke from the retreating parade and joined the fray. Shoulder to shoulder, Teamsters marched with Turtles, Steelworkers and anarchists, students and Wobblies. And the whole world was watching.

We were amazed. And as we all remember so well and reminisce about so readily, that day changed the anti-corporate globalization movement too. It brought together the fair-trade tribes as never before, way beyond the parallel lines of opposition to the NAFTA agreement seven years before.

Things have changed since then. I now work with the Teamsters, whose members I'm proud to represent in the other Washington. We are working with Congress and the new administration to design a pro-worker, pro-environment trade model to replace the flawed and failed model that has cost so many American jobs.

In the intervening years, the "Seattle coalition" has suffered some setbacks—losing the fights against CAFTA and permanent normal trade relations for China come to mind—but on the

whole we have filled the political space we created in the tear gas and drizzle a decade ago. Decision-makers and opinion leaders no longer talk about "side agreements" on labor and the environment, for example, and each year more and more candidates for federal office run and win with labor's support on economic populist platforms, especially fair trade.

Labor should continue to lead the effort to reform global trade rules in the tradition of the Battle of Seattle, the actions in 2000 against the International Monetary Fund, the 2003 demonstrations against the Free Trade Area of the Americas, in Miami, and the recent blue-green protests in Pittsburgh.

To be sure, we are eager to work with the new administration—to educate the pro-NAFTA appointees in the Commerce Department and the Trade Representative's office—but we are also ready to stand up and say no to bad trade deals. That durable militancy against corporate globalization—regardless of the party in power—is the key legacy of Seattle. Ten years after, here is what we are ready to do:

§ rally around trade reform in Congress. Support our champions, like Senator Sherrod Brown and Representative Mike Michaud;

§ make trade reform an issue in the midterm election;

§ change the national conversation about economic recovery so that it centers on trade policy that improves wages and expands jobs here in the United States and around the world;

§ recruit unions that have not traditionally fought for fair trade. Service workers, increasingly harmed by deregulation and privatization, should lead the fight against financial services liberalization;

§ build capacity in the field so that the "Seattle coalition" is growing in every ZIP code in the country. Here at the Teamsters, for example, we have linked our locals and joint councils with the state coordinators of the Citizens Trade Campaign;

§ most of all, we must keep the Spirit of Seattle alive as we work together for economic and environmental justice around the globe. ■

Mike Dolan, a labor lawyer and a charter organizer of the Seattle protests, lives in Washington, DC, where he lobbies for fair trade on behalf of the Teamsters.

Letters

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New England and the state referendums that forced Reagan to do what he had pledged never to do: engage in disarmament negotiations with Soviet leaders.

The rest—as Gorbachev reminds us—is history. Survival requires us to get our history right. Thus we must honor the intellectual and community-based visionaries who understood that nuclear disarmament and democracy were possible and interrelated. We should also honor the people who organized the town meetings, state referendums and mass marches that brought millions into the streets of New York and Western Euro-

pean cities, and those millions whose individual commitments and actions turned the arc of history toward survival and justice.

JOSEPH GERSON

American Friends Service Committee; author, Empire and the Bomb: How the U.S. Uses Nuclear Weapons to Dominate the World

CHICAGO

Gorbachev's place in history is unprecedented. He is the rare leader who could step back and assess the juncture in history before him. He saw a system in dire need of reform and took the difficult steps to begin it. It is remarkable that he told the

East German leaders that the way forward was their choice and, shunning the entire history of Soviet/Eastern Europe, refused to send in Soviet troops to shore up leaders who refused to change with the times.

Unfortunately, as the cold war ended, Clinton coasted and Bush took us backward. Obama, therefore, has a chance to lead as the first real post-cold war president. He has the historical scope of Gorbachev and has begun an initial turnaround. Whether he can match Gorbachev's contributions in normalizing foreign policy and promoting world stability remains to be seen.

CARLYN MEYER

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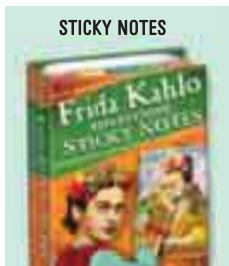


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Books & the Arts.

Like Lives

by DAVID WALLACE-WELLS

In the fall of 1984 *Bright Lights, Big City*, the debut novel by Jay McInerney, was published by an imprint of Knopf. The book seemed to its early readers not simply a piece of fiction but a kind of talisman; it appeared to summon the cultural promise of an entire generation coming of age under Reagan. It was told in the second person, and the insistent “you” was like a serial invitation, one to a new kind of life, in Manhattan, lit by a string of parties in the city’s hipper quarters that might exhilarate you or make you feel despondent, but which certainly made the city itself feel alive again. For a stretch of time people had stopped believing in cities, even this one, and had, in patches, abandoned them, even this one. But *Bright Lights* was composed in the insubordinate spirit of a creative revival; it helped proclaim, to those who came and those who dreamed of coming, that New York City was available once more to the audacious and the reckless young.

In the spring of 1985, Knopf published *Self-Help*, an acerbic collection of stories by the precocious aphorist Lorrie Moore. *Self-Help* was also a debut, and it was also written largely in the second person, but it told a very different story about the allure of city life and the comforts of living in close quarters. One would not want to change places with anyone in Moore’s New York—“it is like having a degree in failure,” she wrote of living there—or, for that matter, with those characters in Scranton, Rochester or Owonta, who viewed the ’80s not as a new frontier but as a deadening stretch of the same old disappointments, romantic, professional, intellectual and filial. A mordant series of devotional texts, *Self-Help* traced those disappointments, mapping the lean inner life of the American boom years. The second-person voice of *Bright Lights* was flat, credulous and smug; Moore’s prose was briny, superior and self-loathing. The book was a study of the dream life of fatalism, and it was narrated in the clairvoyant mood.

“Meet in expensive beige raincoats, on a pea-soupy night. Like a detective movie,” begins “How to Be an Other Woman,” the cheeky first story in the collection. “Whisper,

David Wallace-Wells is an editor at The Paris Review.



ADRIAN BELLESGUARD

‘Don’t go yet,’ as he glides out of your bed before sunrise and you lie there on your back cooling, naked between the sheets and smelling of musky, oniony sweat. Feel gray, like an abandoned locker room towel.” “Smoke marijuana,” advises an entry in “How to Talk to Your Mother (Notes).” “Try to figure out what has made your life go wrong. It is like trying to figure out what is stinking up the refrigerator. It could be anything.” “How to Become a Writer”: “First, try to be something, anything, else. A movie star/astronaut. A movie star/missionary. A movie star/kindergarten teacher. President of the World. Fail miserably.”

There has not been much public failure in Lorrie Moore’s working life. She won a *Seventeen* magazine fiction contest when she was 19 and sold *Self-Help* when she was 26. The stories of that collection were drawn from her work as an MFA candidate at Cornell, and her subsequent stories—published in *Like Life* (1990) and *Birds of America* (1998)—are among the finest and most memorable short fiction produced by an American writer in the generation to follow Raymond Carver. And yet a spirit of devastating failure pervades her work and the lives of the characters who populate it—an acquiescent sensibility arising from quiet despair. Her stories are plotted, typically, with disappointments, and recounted in voices discontent and disconsolate, by characters buckled and wryly resigned to a supermarket culture that overstocks imagination and undersupplies real

A Gate at the Stairs

By Lorrie Moore.
Knopf. 322 pp. \$25.95.

possibility, especially for women and especially in the strip-mall states she has called, archaically, “the Middle West.”

Geography is everywhere in Moore’s fiction, usually as a measure of personal estrangement. “Illinois. It makes me sarcastic to be here,” quips the professor protagonist of “You’re Ugly, Too,” from *Like Life*.

She used to insist it was irony, something gently layered and sophisticated, something alien to the Midwest, but her students kept calling it sarcasm, something they felt qualified to recognize, and now she had to agree. It wasn’t irony. *What is your perfume?* a student once asked her. *Room freshener*, she said.

“You had to get out once in a while,” declares the professor. “Even if it was just across the border to Terre Haute, for a movie.” “I feel like I’ve got five years to live,” says Agnes, in “Agnes of Iowa,” having made a brief go of things in New York. “So I’m moving back to Iowa so that it’ll feel like fifty.”

Alienation is the main preoccupation of this early work, rendered by Moore out of fidelity to her subjects not as a cultural condition but a social fact: the feeling of being pressed, as if by centrifugal force, to the periphery of conversations that whirl before you

wildly as zoetropes, of buzzing invisibly as an electron in the distant orbit of some truly nuclear party. Her protagonists are invariably witty, but wit is, in Moore's wallflower fiction, simply another measure of human distance.

"At a party," she writes in "How to Talk to Your Mother (Notes),"

when a woman tells you where she bought some wonderful pair of shoes, say that you believe shopping for clothes is like masturbation—everyone does it, but it isn't very interesting and therefore should be done alone, in an embarrassed fashion, and never be the topic of party conversation. The woman will tighten her lips and eyebrows and say, "Oh, I suppose you have something more fascinating to talk about." Grow clumsy and uneasy. Say, "No," and head for the ginger ale.

Moore has now published three novels, and yet she is known primarily as an author of short fiction. She is a moody writer and a master of compression, and her stories stand up mostly on the stilts of her dry humor. She is such a skilled and cutting aphorist that she was criticized early in her career for writing stories that kept the emotional lives of her characters at an ironic distance—that made them the butt of jokes, hers and their own. But she beat that charge so thoroughly with the stories of *Birds of America*, and particularly its remarkable cancer tale, "People Like That Are the Only People Here," that the book earned the contrasting moniker "calamity" fiction. (If the joke was on anything in that story, it was on wordplay itself.) Her characters may share her brackish wit, but it doesn't seem to do them much good, in her more recent work especially. Irony isn't a weapon for these people; it's a brand of delusion. Most of them lack the vigilante wherewithal to propel themselves through plots and so find themselves trapped instead in scenes, often oppressive domestic ones. Yet the confines of these small narrative spaces are no bulwark against disaster; catastrophe still strikes, and miseries descend. Wit, for all its charm, is futile protest, a private gesture and, at best, a silent, often retrospective comfort.

A Gate at the Stairs, Moore's third novel, is also her third clotted with problems, and the lesser quality of these longer works has been for some time now the final critical obstacle to what would seem to be an otherwise inevitable coronation. In *Anagrams* (1986), she shuffled together a half-dozen variations on a

single melancholic romantic pairing, substituting a stock formal trick for a narrative arc; in *Who Will Run the Frog Hospital?* (1994), a different kind of scrapbook novel, she stretched too thin a small canvas of adolescent memory to fit the oversize frame of its recollection in adulthood. And yet it is not simply the scale of these stories that has confounded critics over the years but the slipperiness of style and genre in her work. (She recently described the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector as a "sphinx" in a *New York Review of Books* essay that could pass for self-criticism.) She has been called glib (the *Los Angeles Times*) and journalistic (the *New York Observer*); she has also been deemed a parodist (the *New York Times*), an ironist (*Newsweek*) and a raconteuse (the *New York Times* again). Most often she is dubbed a realist; the *London Review of Books* has even called her writing "super-real," whatever that is supposed to mean.

But objectivity and artifact have never interested Moore. Her "Middle West" is a spiritual state, and she can play fast and loose with the time stamp of period detail; her character studies are not sober portraits so much as glimpses, sidelong, through a bell jar. However incisive her prose, Moore is an absurdist storyteller, keen only on a particular variety of emotional verisimilitude, staging in the cramped theater of pathos fiction a familiar and often grotesque internal opera. That this absurdist spirit has been noted by so few critics can be explained, perhaps, by her chosen topics and themes, which are familiar as the tropes of "women's fiction" and may have eased her acceptance by the book-buying public (*Birds of America* is one of literary publishers' rarest and finest feathered friends: a short-story collection that became a bestseller).

A Gate at the Stairs is Moore's most ambitious novel and her slipperiest work to date, and its publication has only deepened the confusion about what kind of writer Moore really is. The novel, baggily modeled on *Jane Eyre*, purports to be a Bildungsroman devoted to the coming-of-age of Tassie Keltjin, a searching young woman so indistinct she can at times seem invisible. The book's prose is sharp, but its plotting is casual, if not downright reckless; rather than present a credibly straightforward narrative, Moore assembles a pastiche of adolescent reveries; cutting character sketches; idyllic reflections on landscapes, growing seasons and migratory patterns; biting academic comedy; immersive domestic melodrama; and intimate moments of genuine tragedy. The reader hopscotches through it and finds himself, after several

leaps of faith, caught in the latticework of an improbable 9/11 novel.

The qualities that made Moore seem an unlikely novelist in *Anagrams* and *Who Will Run the Frog Hospital?*—a narrow focus on private and interior lives, a fastidiousness about the sharpness of language and an indifference to what is often called "relevance"—might seem to disqualify her from the hyperbolic business of writing broad, topical social novels. And yet *A Gate at the Stairs* is resolutely a book about 9/11: it covers the year following the attacks, terminating in the winter of 2002 with the buildup for war in Iraq (a "plot hatched with neocon intellectuals who, like aging former members of a high school chess club, wanted a tournament they could win"). It makes passing references to campus protests and political debates ("I was on the side of dissent and despair," confesses Tassie), and counts among its small circle of characters a radical Islamist and a volunteer American soldier sent hurriedly to Afghanistan.

It is an unusual approach to the subject: the book is slight, provincial, languid. The military drama transpires offstage; likewise the political theater. Rather than make 9/11 the centerpiece of her 9/11 novel, Moore introduces it in the book's opening passages as a red herring. The "events of September," as she calls the unspooling global drama, are unmistakably present in the story, but unmistakably as background. The themes she showcases at center stage are, instead, familiar ones: adolescence, race, motherhood, the Middle West. And the two main characters so closely resemble archetypes that Moore has deployed in her stories—a sensitive young wallflower puzzling through early adulthood; a longaninous woman reconciling herself to motherhood and middle age—that they seem summoned from those pages for the didactic purpose of suggesting continuity with her previous books and with the anxieties of the era that gave rise to them. In those books—*Self-Help*, *Anagrams* and *Like Life*—Moore offered stories of the dejected and adrift as a narrative counterpoint to the go-go triumphalism of the roaring '80s; *A Gate at the Stairs* represents a renewed protest on behalf of the natural complexity of lived experience and against the temptations of a narrative order that suggests that our public apologies are a reliable reflection of our private lives. Moore is concerned here not with the incinerating attacks but their slow-burn aftermath; not with disaster as public allegory but

BREAK THE SIEGE

On December 27th, just one year after Israel launched its brutal attack on Gaza, one thousand people from all over the world will meet in Cairo on their way to Gaza for The Gaza Freedom March. On December 31st they will walk arm-in-arm with tens of thousands of Palestinians in a non-violent march demanding an end to the siege of Gaza.

A year since the attack and no homes have been rebuilt...
A year since the attack and no schools have been rebuilt...
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with our ordinary domesticated millenarianism; not with the few ways American life was transformed by terrorism but the many ways in which, ultimately, it was not.

"If September 11 had to happen," Martin Amis wrote in *The Second Plane*, his meditation on the fate of the imagination in the age of terror, "then I am not at all sorry that it happened in my lifetime." Amis was exhilarated by the subject and the spectacle of the attacks, animated by the feeling that afterward the playpen of liberal expression might seem once again to circumscribe a political purpose, that the crucible of cultural conflict could be an emboldening experience—and that men like Martin Amis might plausibly audition for the role of George Orwell. What

petual, holy condition of bedazzlement and wonder; no story would ever have been equal to the thing itself. And so it was with me."

Tassie is curious, even expansively so, but her intellectual profile is one of false bookishness: "My brain was on fire with Chaucer, Sylvia Plath, Simone de Beauvoir," she boasts, but she enrolls in courses on wine tasting, war movie soundtracks and "a double-listed humanities and Pilates course called The Perverse Body/The Neutral Pelvis." School does not seem to interest Tassie much, for all her vision-quest hyperbole. She is chasing experience, not secondhand stories, and her real education will be extracurricular, an immersive program of surrogate motherhood. She hires on as a "childcare provider" to a professional couple in middle

age and just embarking on a maiden adoption. And there the Brontë architecture begins to emerge: a curious governess, a suspicious home, a forbidding Byronic hero and a troubled mother figure conspiring to hide some secret past from view. But in this novel the heat and light come not from the *frisson* of romance but the new glow of child life in an otherwise barren home.

Adoption seemed both a cruel joke and a lovely daydream," Moore writes, and her portrayal in *A Gate at the Stairs* of the awkward, estranged network of surrogates and spouses, matchmakers and caretakers created by the birth of a single wayward baby is among the most subtle and moving depictions in recent fiction of motherhood and maternal desire. Adoption can be a forlorn kind of parenthood, and in her caustic early stories Moore might have mocked the anguish that courses through the meeting rooms of adoption clinics and gets registered on waiting lists that represent a roll call of American longing. In those early stories, childbirth is rendered as an expiration date for youth, and for youthful hope. But, returning to old themes in recent work, Moore has been more forgiving, presenting maternal self-doubt as a form of universal performance anxiety and yielding her mothers enough narrative rope for at least a proper second act. *A Gate at the Stairs* is a melancholy deliberation on the second act in the American life of an inconsolable but irrepressible mother-to-be named Sarah Brink.

"In everything I do there seems to be some part missing," Sarah tells Tassie in a reflective moment. "I'm discovering that it is almost impossible to be a mother and also do anything of value outside the house. But that *almost* is key, and I'm living in the oxygenated heart of that word." Sarah is the chef-owner of a pious local-seasonal restaurant ("It was an odd experience for me," Tassie says, of eating alone there, "to have the palate so cared for and the spirit so untouched") and the disappointed wife of a charismatic loner named Edward Thornwood, who seems only halfway committed to late parenthood, and perhaps even less so to Sarah. (His name recalls Mr. Rochester's Thornfield Hall, and his sporadic advances toward Tassie are the only erotically charged passages in the novel.) Sarah is neurotic—she bakes library books to sanitize them—and sorrowful; she is piecing together a new life for herself as if from an instruction manual. "I always do the wrong thing," she says at one point. "I do the wrong thing so much that the times I actually do the right thing stand out so brightly in my memory that I forget I always do the wrong thing."

Motherhood, it seems, is the right thing—one right thing, anyway. Distressed and discouraged—Sarah looks, Tassie notes at their first meeting, "like a highly controlled oxidation experiment"—she is nevertheless no defeatist, and adoption transforms her into a sympathetic family fortune-seeker. "I could see she was getting ready to enter a new understanding of society," Tassie observes, equal parts loyalist and skeptic. "It would be artificial and touristic. It would be motherhood in a safari suit," she says. "It was better than some. Probably it was better than most."

It seems better, certainly, than the foster home from which the Thornwood-Brinks extract their baby, Mary-Emma, though "baby" is not quite right—she's been juggled among various homes and agencies and is now, under the supervision of the teenage daughter of an indifferent foster mother, approaching 2. And yet the new family is no safe haven from familiar threats or latent fears. Mary-Emma is half-black, which in the adoption business, we discover quickly, does not make the most attractive package. Sarah is warned several times about the race of prospective children, warnings that rankle. "People would rather go to China!" she exclaims. "All the way to China before they would take in a black kid from their own state." An adoption agent who brags that she is raising a biracial son "with a sense of total racial blindness" later causes Sarah to spit, "Racial blindness—now there's a very white idea."

Gradually the problem of race shifts to the center of the book, pushed there by the forces of atavism at work even in the most progressive outposts. "I don't really believe in interracial relationships," confesses Mary-Emma's birth mother. "Looks like she's been

In Moore's novel, 9/11 is one more existential menace in a world already full of them.

9/11 means to Moore, and why she would write a novel around it, is less clear. It seems unlikely that her characters share Amis's feelings about 9/11 (neither, we imagine, does their author), though they rarely speak of it. For them the climate of the preceding years was quite desperate and millenarian enough, and in *A Gate at the Stairs*, 9/11 appears less as a genuine intercession than as a complementary spectacle, with terrorism simply one more existential menace in a world already full of them—renewing old anxieties, deepening existing fears and substantiating a pervasive underculture of anomalous despair. For Lorrie Moore's people, the attacks were a Trojan horse, enclosing an entire army of familiar foes.

"I had come...to this university town of Troy, 'the Athens of the Midwest,' as if from a cave," Tassie tells us early in the novel, "like the priest-child of a Colombian tribe I'd read about in Cultural Anthropology, a boy made mystical by being kept in the dark for the bulk of his childhood and allowed only stories—no experience—of the outside world." Tassie's innocence is real enough, but she comes, in fact, from a less exotic place, a nearby farming community—the daughter of a marriage fractured and perhaps improperly reset—where her father dedicates himself to growing boutique lettuces and potatoes through what she calls, with affectionate derision, "Dadaist agriculture." "Once brought out into light, [the child] would be in a per-

eating a lot of squash and carrots!" jokes a receptionist. And then there are still uglier incidents, including one especially nasty encounter with a carful of loitering teenagers who, perhaps mistaking Tassie for the birth mother, holler a racial epithet as though it were a sexual reprimand.

Tassie is mystified by the outburst, amazed that it could happen in this right-thinking college town. ("Here was so proud of itself," she ponders. "Here was so progressive and exemplary.") Sarah is less surprised and more indignant. "I'm forming a support group," she announces. "I'm going to bring families of color into this home, and we are going to discuss things and pool our strengths and share our stories and plot our collective actions," she says, marshaling boilerplate language to address the persistent problem of racial prejudice. "Would you supervise the children?"

These meetings, which punctuate the second half of the novel, are half echo chamber and half key party, a first-floor retreat into dated political theater as Tassie, upstairs, minds the future generation. "War was devised to offset the number of women who died in childbirth," declares one partygoer. "I don't like the use of the word *adoption* for animals," testifies another. "I don't believe in gay culture or white culture or female culture

or any of that." "I once heard I.B. Singer speak of the holocaust of chickens." "Don't get me started on Islam!"

"Was this the grassroots whimpering of an important social movement, or was it a small, deep madness?" Tassie wonders of the shuffling conversation of synonymous minds. "If two things fell in the forest and made the same sound, which was the tree?" Stationed at the landing with the children, eavesdropping on the bickering and back-scratching below, Tassie, a wise naïf like her antecedent Jane Eyre, embodies the wisdom generated by enforced distance, and is no more seduced by the temptation to narrate life through ideological principle than Sarah is by the temptation to narrate it through tragedy. From the landing, political piety looks to be a fantasy; like irony, it offers only an illusion of stability. It will not save Mary-Emma. And it will be a special kind of tragedy for Tassie when they lose her.

That small tragedy is the tender heart of the novel, but Moore papers it over with several sloppy layers of bathos. A cipher of a boyfriend reveals himself to be a sleeper-cell terrorist, and after inspiring some of the best writing in the book ("His penis was as small and satiny as a trumpet mushroom in Easter basket grass," thinks Tassie), he delivers some

of its worst dialogue: "You are an innocent girl—though you are not pure. But still, I believe you are innocent. Especially for a Jew." Bizarrely, the revelation of her par amour's true identity excites no political horror in Tassie; instead, their breakup is rendered in terms borrowed from other dead-end romances in Moore's fiction. That her boyfriend is the nightmare incarnation of our American fears appears to interest neither the lover nor the writer as much as the quotidian revelation that he is, at bottom, a cad.

Later in the novel, Sarah discloses to Tassie an incredible parental back story, which, rather than making sense of her hesitant longing and muted romance with Edward, cheapens and flattens them both. When Tassie's brother places in her hands more or less complete responsibility for his life, asking her to decide whether or not he should enlist in the Army, she neglects to open his e-mail. At his funeral a few foreshortened months later, she climbs into his coffin and closes the lid.

One of these sensational twists might be forgivable in a novel as engaging as this one; two of them would be inexcusable for a writer like Moore, who has always demonstrated such dexterity and narrative control; three of them,

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however, must be willful, and as the histrionics accumulate in the second half of the novel, *A Gate at the Stairs* begins to appear more and more a 9/11 farce, mocking the very enterprise of fashioning a coherent and conventional novel from those terrible events and the chaotic years that followed. Moore seems to be mocking, too, the novelistic impulses of our hyperbolic public life, in which private histories are reconfigured into broad narratives dictated by distant events. She offers instead a Gothic melodrama for our particular age of anxiety, a new model novel wrapped in its own cautionary tale. In presenting her readers with both a poignant domestic story and a series of contrived and grandiose narrative flourishes, intrusions that seem more to obscure than to illuminate the lives of her characters, Moore appears to be suggesting that social novels need not be master-narrative dirigibles like those favored by Don DeLillo and Jonathan Franzen, among others. They can be assembled instead, like much social history, from the ground up, piecemeal, from minor and private testimony. They can be as local and ragged as a patchwork quilt. The history might even be better that way.

The novel—or this novel, unfortunately—is not. As a reworking of the story of American life in the aftermath of 9/11, *A Gate at the Stairs* yields little new knowledge about those years. As a new model of the social novel, it is ultimately neither ecumenically broad nor genuinely bottom-up; it is composed instead from the inside out, like a dream journal. And Moore, the master miniaturist, proves herself here remarkably undisciplined working outside the diorama of soliloquy fiction. That difficulty is only compounded by her peculiar compunction to conceal what vivid natural life there is in her story under heavy Gothic lacquer. Vigilant throughout *A Gate at the Stairs* about not letting 9/11 hijack her 9/11 novel, Moore allows the book to be carried away instead by her flights of fancy. (What does Charlotte Brontë have to teach us about war and terrorism, one cannot help wondering.) The result is a novel that is less a testament to the neglected imaginative commonwealth of intimate experience than to the esoteric ghetto of our autistic fantasy lives. And this failure is all the more damning for its being deliberate. “The people in this house,” Tassie confides, channeling Moore late in the novel, “were like characters each from a different grim and gruesome fairy tale. None of us was in the same story. We were all grotesques, and self-riveted, but in separate narratives,

and so our interactions seemed weird and richly meaningless.”

The echo of E.M. Forster, and his advice to “only connect,” is unmistakable, but the echo fills an empty room. In Moore’s universe, depth of feeling has always been measured by distance from others. There

is not, she suggests, more meaning to be found in more engagement, only less. The fiction wrung from this fatalism is not simply absurdist; it is fiction of the perverse. And yet, in dexterous hands perversity can seem like conjured possibility; with Moore the possibilities are, and remain, endless. ■

Sometimes a Small Redemption

by ALEXANDRA SCHWARTZ

“**R**ussian literature has been a kind of religion in this country—a religion based on the moral position of writers, on their suffering,” Ludmilla Petrushevskaya once told Sally Laird, her British translator. “All our greatest writers have been sufferers and saints.” It was May 1987, and *Immortal Love*, Petrushevskaya’s first collection of short stories, would be published the following year, just in time for her fiftieth birthday. If suffering really could be considered a legitimate qualification for literary greatness, Petrushevskaya had more than earned her due. A year after she was born in 1938, her father abandoned the family, leaving her in Moscow with her mother, the daughter of an eminent linguistics professor. Stalin’s Great Purge was under way, and her mother’s relatives, old-time Bolshevik intellectuals involved in the revolution, were summarily rounded up for arrest and execution. Though the surviving family members managed to escape during World War II to Kuibyshev, the temporary capital on the Volga River established by the USSR in the face of Germany’s advance, they—like everyone—starved through the war years. Petrushevskaya was sent away to a children’s home, where her ragged compatriots were impressed enough by her particular deprivation to nickname her “the Moscow matchstick.”

This brief exile proved to be a blessing. Food and clothes, so hard to come by elsewhere, were in ready supply. Attended to by a group of kindly female teachers, the children could shrug off the twin wartime burdens of fear and adult responsibility. Play, not survival, had once again become the essential business of childhood. (Decades later, Petrushevskaya would recall a performance of a gypsy song and dance that had given her an



Ludmilla Petrushevskaya

ANASTASIA KAZAKOVA

There Once Lived a Woman Who Tried to Kill Her Neighbor’s Baby *Scary Fairy Tales.*

By Ludmilla Petrushevskaya.

Translated by Keith Gessen and Anna Summers.

Penguin. 206 pp. Paper \$15.

early taste of the theater, undoubtedly a momentous experience for an author who would initially make her name as a playwright.) But soon her mother and grandfather, who had relocated to Moscow, called on her to join them, forcing her to trade the happiness of a carefree child’s world for a claustrophobic domestic arrangement.

Postwar Moscow was flooded with itinerants who had abandoned the ravaged countryside for the city, and housing, chronically in short supply, had reached an unprecedented degree of scarcity. Petrushevskaya’s family shared a twelve-square-meter room—a cubbyhole carved out of the family’s subdivided former apartment. Indoors, Petrushevskaya watched her grandfather—fired from

Alexandra Schwartz is a former Nation intern.

his university position, stripped of his pension, isolated from his students and colleagues—lurch toward insanity without the dignity afforded by solitude. Outdoors, in the building's yard, she kept to herself, an intelligentsia-bred pariah among working-class children well versed in the lessons of the streets.

Petrushevskaya's adulthood was marked by tragedy: her first husband died at 32 after an illness that had paralyzed him for six years, leaving his widow as the sole provider for their young son. But Petrushevskaya would always remember her Moscow childhood and adolescence as the apogee of misery. The overcrowded apartment, seething with tension between toiling parents and ungrateful children, frustrated spouses and suspicious in-laws, stands at the heart of her unrelenting, often acerbically funny depictions of Soviet life. In *The Time: Night*, Petrushevskaya's first novel, published in 1992, the poet Anna shuttles with her young grandson between her friends' flats, calculating that the owners of "a nice postwar apartment" will lend her money, bargaining in on another family just in time to scrounge a meal. Such episodes are not so much personal visits as conscious invasions meant to flout the protocol of a society obsessed with hard-won privacy. Anna's willingness to force her way through others' doors exposes the hostile stinginess of daily life in Moscow, even as her ill-concealed envy renders her ridiculous; it would be difficult to say whether she or her reluctant hosts, who guard their kitchens and bedrooms as greedily as misers, come off as more petty.

If Petrushevskaya's litany of mid-century suffering seems routine—what, after all, is less remarkable than tales of Russian misfortune—that's part of the point. Petrushevskaya insisted on locating so much of her work in the "mini-Gulag" of the Stalin-era home rather than on some more specific personal hardship precisely because she recognized that, lonely as she felt in the yard or at the library, another frequent haunt, "there were thousands of children in my position." The housing shortage forced residents living cheek by jowl to retreat into whatever seclusion they could manage to secure, and much of Petrushevskaya's fiction engages in breaking through this barrier to imagine the kind of lives that might have transpired within a hairsbreadth of her own, perhaps heard in fits and snatches through the wall of the adjoining flat. The stories and first-person monologues of *Immortal Love* are, for the most part, realistic accounts of small lives that gain a degree of dignity by being singled out for

recounting: a girl crosses a field in the rain with another woman's fiancé and realizes that no further connection between them is possible; a naïve young woman offers her co-workers details of her family life and fails to notice their discomfort at being made privy to so much information. But an eerie existential undercurrent runs through much of the collection, surfacing, for instance, in the tale of a mother who claims that she has had a virgin birth, or that of a woman who doesn't realize her stomach pain is the result of pregnancy until she miscarries.

It is this startling, dark stream that Keith Gessen and Anna Summers have asked us to fathom in their new edition of Petrushevskaya's work. The stories collected in *There Once Lived a Woman Who Tried to Kill Her Neighbor's Baby*, many of them translated into English for the first time, cover the familiar domain of domestic conflict and urban despair, but the situations are infused with a strong dose of the supernatural that lends them extreme, often ghastly, consequences.

In "Hygiene," a little girl opens the door to the apartment she shares with her parents and grandparents to find a young man bearing a sinister message:

He said he'd come to warn the family of an immediate danger: There was an epidemic in the town, an illness that killed in three days. People turned red, they swelled up, and then, mostly, they died. The chief symptom was the appearance of blisters, or bumps. There was some hope of surviving if you observed strict personal hygiene, stayed inside the apartment, and made sure there were no mice around—since mice, as always, were the main carriers of the disease.

The messenger says that he has survived the plague and become immune, and offers to bring the R. family supplies so that they don't expose themselves to infection. After he leaves, they cannot agree on an appropriate response to the threat. The grandfather has refused his help, as have the neighbors, who can be heard laughing at the man through the door; the grandmother thinks of a similar episode in which a stranger came to solicit money for a neighbor's funeral, only to vanish with the alms she had collected. But the father secretly believes the young man's story, though circumstances forbid him from voicing his mind: "These were his wife's parents, not his, and he rarely agreed with them about anything. Nor did they ex-

actly ask his opinion." Over the next few days, it is he who leaves the house to steal—and eventually kill—to secure provisions for the family, wiping himself in the hallway with eau-de-cologne upon his nightly return to keep the plague at bay.

The explicit terror of "Hygiene" lies in the prospect of an indiscriminating and unavoidable death, which, when it comes, is gruesome and swift. But its greater, more lasting horror is apparent from the outset in the messenger's stipulation that the R. family remain together inside their apartment. Rather than foster solidarity in the face of disaster, the close quarters exacerbate, to a brutal and grotesque degree, the natural domestic antagonism present in Petrushevskaya's other work; the apartment, silent backdrop to the characters' anxiety, is at once an emblem of the family's distress and a partner to it. When the family quarantines their little girl in her locked room for kissing their mouse-eating cat, telling her to defecate on books and pass her urine out in bottles though she is not yet old enough to wash herself, the home has completed its transition into a prison camp. Petrushevskaya has made good on the promise of her metaphor of the "mini-Gulag." Under the right conditions, it turns out, the figurative lockup has always had the potential to become real.

There Once Lived a Woman Who Tried to Kill Her Neighbor's Baby is only the third volume of Petrushevskaya's fiction to be published in English, and the first to arrive since Sally Laird's translation of *Immortal Love* appeared in 1995. The general inaccessibility of Petrushevskaya's works in English defies her popularity in her home country but echoes her publishing history there. Though Petrushevskaya began to submit her work to magazines in the 1960s, Soviet political and aesthetic constraints kept her pointed accounts of everyday struggles under communist rule out of the press. "To survive these conditions as a writer you have to have—I don't know, something out of the ordinary," she told Laird in 1987. That "something," as it later became apparent, was a combination of patience and indomitable persistence. She began to garner attention in the mid-1970s for her plays, and by the time artistic sanctions were relaxed under glasnost, she had gained a following as a mainstay of Moscow's experimental theater. Her first volume of stories was published in 1988; despite her prediction that it would never find the audience her theatrical works had, her fiction

has been in print ever since.

The stories that Gessen and Summers have compiled will likely be the first of Petrushevskaya's work that most English-speaking readers encounter, and as such it makes for a compelling if skewed introduction. By combing through her *oeuvre* for "mystical and fantastical tales," they have assembled a series of works whose striking immediacy is a far cry from Petrushevskaya's more quotidian stories. Her prose is so sparse and succinct that it can seem as if she is rationing her words as prudently as the R. family rations their food; she is like the messenger in "Hygiene," who cannot afford to indulge in any superfluous language that would prevent his message from getting across. "When I started writing properly I stopped trying to imitate and wrote just as simply as I could, without metaphor or simile, in the voice people use to tell their story to another person on the bus—urgently, hastily, making sure you come to the point before the bus stops and the other person has to get off," Petrushevskaya has recollected. "And then you know that the story will get passed on, and that's the beginning of folklore." Set against the extraordinary plots and happenings that characterize this collection, such urgency lends the tales a starkness that rivals the opacity of the magic that drives them. The stories feel elemental and colloquial, their complexity sustained by the simplicity of the telling.

Still, the volume's stress on the supernatural creates a somewhat false impression of Petrushevskaya. The fantastical may be essential to her fictional universe, but by emphasizing it at the expense of the commonplace situations central to her work, Gessen and Summers risk undermining the engagement with quotidian experience that lends power to their selections in the first place. The "scary" of the book's subtitle feels reductively sensationalist, a false advertisement for stories that seek to unsettle and disturb in ways far subtler than such a shopworn word implies. In Russia, Petrushevskaya has published a collection of "Everyday and Magical Fairy Tales," as well as "Real Fairy Tales." The stories in *There Once Lived a Woman Who Tried to Kill Her Neighbor's Baby* may be linked by their exploration of the uncanny, but, like the best spooky literature, their drama always hinges on actual experience.

In "The Arm," the piece that opens the collection, a colonel who receives word from his wife that she may die before she sees him again rushes home just in time to find that her prediction has come to pass. After he begins his journey back to his base, he discovers that his party card has gone missing, and

is directed by his wife in a dream to find it in her coffin, but to avoid lifting the veil from her face. When he fails to restrain himself, the focus of the story becomes the nightmarish world that the colonel enters upon his return trip. But it has been set in motion by the loss of his party card, an event with frightening repercussions that are entirely distinct from the consequences of lifting the veil. Without his card, the colonel is temporarily stripped of his former status and any coherent sense of identity. He has become a no one, transformed into a member of the living dead not by magic but by the patently real strictures of party bureaucracy.

When Petrushevskaya was growing up, Soviet children were taught the slogan "Fairy tale has become reality," illustrated by songs such as "Ever Higher":

We were born that fairy tale might
become reality
To conquer the vastness of space
Reason gave us steel wings for arms,
And in the place of a heart they gave
us a fiery motor.

As party directives mandated the creation of Socialist Realism, the arts were prodded and warped to promote the notion of the USSR's collective destiny. Yet myths are not quite fairy tales, and the official Soviet conception of the fairy tale was much like a Disney reinvention of a Grimm story, piling on the glitz and excising any hint of unresolved violence or danger. "A fairy tale fulfills the role of a social utopia," Roman Jakobson declared in an essay to accompany the classic 1945 edition of traditional Russian fairy tales that Aleksandr Afanasyev had collected during the nineteenth century; but this isn't necessarily the case.

Fairy tales map the territory of the abnormal as it affects individual lives. For all their usual happy endings, they don't resolve the inexplicable with the neat conclusion of a collective myth, and they don't offer a vision of redemption for society as a whole. Reason has no place in a genre that deals with the purely unfathomable, and Petrushevskaya's tales are all the more seditious for accentuating that point. Grisha, the protagonist of "A New Soul," becomes hysterical when his son is conscripted into the army, until he suddenly "wakes up" as a Russian immigrant in the United States. He has been placed in a mental hospital, and upon his release feels despondent until he falls in love and returns to Russia, where he meets his new wife's son, who bears an uncanny resemblance to his own boy. Is

the immigrant Grisha a figure in the original Grisha's hallucination, or vice versa? Are we meant to believe that an incredible transformation actually did take place? Petrushevskaya refuses to tell, and ends her story with a shrug rather than a moral: "and no one ever did explain it to either of them."

Jakobson, like many of his fellow Soviet linguists and scholars, looked to fairy and folk tales as genres that could be manipulated to express the ethos of an "epoch when borders between utopia and reality are being effaced," as he wrote in his Afanasyev commentary. In his hope for a society that could transform itself from ugly duckling to swan, he gave little consideration to the possibility that reality, with all its flaws, could one day prove far more desirable than any manufactured utopia. As far as metaphors for the Soviet project go, Jakobson might have considered "The Black Coat," the final story in Gessen and Summers's collection. The story's principal character is "a girl who found herself in an unknown place, on a cold winter night.... The girl didn't remember her name or who she was." The girl doesn't know where she's come from or where she's going, and is motivated to move only to get out of the cold. Alone, terrified, with no sense of her identity or past and seemingly condemned to a phantasmagoric existence in which all of reality's borders have been rubbed out, the girl cries, "I want to wake up.... I want to end this horrible nightmare."

Petrushevskaya's own brand of fairy tale straddles the line between reality and utopia, intermingling the dismal oppressiveness of life in a Moscow apartment with the joy that can be found in a children's home. "I think of myself as a documentary writer," she has said, "collecting documents about people's lives and reworking them." As a collector, she has far more in common with Afanasyev, who followed the example of the Grimms by compiling the homespun tales of the peasantry, than with Jakobson. But inasmuch as she has refashioned stories gleaned from existing lives, Petrushevskaya has managed to amend a central facet of the typical fairy tale: the all-powerful ability of the external agent, whether Cinderella's godmother or the gray wolf of "The Firebird," to determine the hero's or heroine's fate. Even when confronted with acute pressure and unremitting bleakness, Petrushevskaya's protagonists can find ways to shape their destinies when they choose to think—and act—on their own. It's as if, as Petrushevskaya writes of one of her heroines, they have passed the hardest test of their lives. ■

Containing Welles

by STUART KLAWANS

The story of an omelet told from an eggshell's point of view, *Me and Orson Welles* relates the events of one week in November 1937, when a fictional high school student named Richard happens upon some actors goofing off on New York's Forty-first Street and gets cast in a show that just might open: the Mercury Theatre's soon-to-be-legendary *Caesar*. A day-tripping kid from the suburbs will accidentally participate in greatness. As the Mercury's office manager and all-purpose sweetheart puts it, he will get to sit at the feet of Orson Welles and be showered with his spittle.

As swift and stripped-down as its title, the *Caesar* into which Richard has wandered will thrillingly transform Shakespeare's Roman general into a present-day dictator in jackboots and black shirt, provided the director and star ever lets the play get out of rehearsals. Welles is a dictator too, you see, though without any ideal of military discipline, and evidently can't bear to set an opening date, because then the chaos would end and he could no longer go on bullying and seducing and making everyone in the company wait on his every whim. "Can you play the ukulele?" Welles demands of Richard upon seeing him on the sidewalk, as if it were the first question that would pop into anyone's mind. Without asking why, Richard looks Welles in the eye, lies and says yes. Welles stares back, recognizes the lie and hires him anyway, telling him he's now Lucius. It seems the dictator has found a new underling, one with just enough spirit to make him temporarily interesting to break.

But I'm making *Me and Orson Welles* sound grim and scolding, when in fact it's merely a little melancholy around the edges. Directed by Richard Linklater as one of his bustling, large-ensemble excursions into misbehavior—think of *Dazed and Confused* or *School of Rock*, but with a period setting and blank verse—the film is if anything a product of infatuation: with the limitlessness of Welles, the boisterous self-involvement of acting companies and (above all) the perpetual astonishment of young people at finding themselves where they are.

Welles was one of these young people, or should have been. Though already famous in New York theater circles by 1937, and furiously busy as one of America's most successful radio actors, he was 22 when he found-

ed the Mercury Theatre with John Houseman and staged *Caesar*—making him all of five years older than the Richard he addresses as "Junior" throughout the film. The one serious objection I can make to *Me and Orson Welles* is that Christian McKay's uncanny reincarnation of Welles the Boy Genius—"impersonation" would be too weak a word—has too little of the boy in it. You get Welles the self-propelling volcano, rumbling in every decibel range, swiveling his girth from side to side and occasionally letting forth actual flames (just one of his magic tricks)—the Welles, that is, who had to be propitiated, as various members of the acting company keep telling Richard. You also get Welles the mischief-maker, of course, who enlivens Linklater's film by zooming around New York in a rented ambulance, or habitually striding into radio studios mere seconds before air time. (It's all true.) But this side of Welles's character seems almost a condescension in the movie. You don't get a sense that this grand figure really was, chronologically, within tantalizing reach of a high school kid.

Maybe *Caesar*'s triumph could have seemed less of a foregone conclusion in the film, and therefore even more exciting, had Welles's eruptions before the company included the overtone of a tantrum, to hint that he, too, was young enough to be staggered by his own life. And maybe the film's theme of the vast, cruel difference between two classes of people—those who love the arts and those who are geniuses in them—could have been a little more bittersweet, had Richard ever calculated the gap between himself and Welles and imagined he might catch up.

As it is, though, the character Richard dreams he can catch is the Mercury Theatre's office girl, Sonja. She, too, is only a few years older and seems, miraculously, to be attainable. The likelihood that she's not will occur to you long before it does to Richard, looming as one of a few too many predictabilities in the screenplay. (It's written by longtime Linklater collaborators Holly Gent Palmo and Vince Palmo Jr., based on a novel of the same title by Robert Kaplow.) But if surprise and suspense are in short supply here, *Me and Orson Welles* nevertheless gives you an abundance of a far more valuable movie asset—charm—in the persons of its Sonja and Richard.

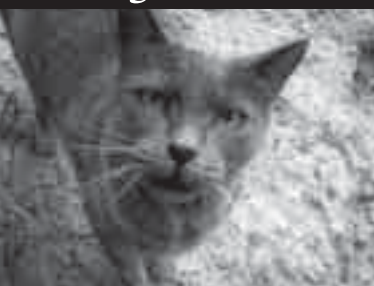
She is played by Claire Danes, whose smile is self-confidently turned up to full wattage for the role and then given an extra glow by a master of gemlike color, cinematographer Dick Pope, who offers her the most loving photography of her career. Danes glides through her scenes with the air of a woman who is used to such adoration (both from the characters around her and the audience in the movie house) and accepts it with relaxed amusement. Her critical moment comes when she drops the smile, revealing a disillusioned calculation in Sonja that is as close as *Me and Orson Welles* comes to evoking the desperation that was everywhere in 1937.

As for Richard, he's played by the ultimate heartthrob of preteen America, Zac Efron. Made famous in the *High School Musical* cycle as the slimmest, shortest and most sexless boy ever to pose as a teenage basketball star—his Disneyfied prettiness disrupted only by the weight of his eyebrows, his delivery of pop-song product uncomplicated by any urge toward musical self-expression—Efron might seem at first glance to have been a fatal choice to carry *Me and Orson Welles*. But Linklater has proved that what used to be true of Bing Crosby (in the words of his most successful director, Leo McCarey) is also true of Efron: he can do no wrong in front of a camera. To play Richard, Efron must swagger, but in a guileless, shrugging way; mope, but without ever losing his buoyancy; deceive others and be deceived, but in either case keep the audience on his side. When I think of the demands of the role, it now seems to me that anyone other than Efron would have been fatal—and that's without taking into account the need to stand up against Christian McKay's overwhelming performance, which seems as much a force of nature as was Welles himself.

I count it to the credit of *Me and Orson Welles* that the film does not emulate the gargantuan qualities of its title character but is content to contain them. There's something pleasingly modest about the production, from its sleight-of-hand re-creation of 1930s Manhattan (on sets in London and the Isle of Man) to its fleet but unapologetically sketchy reconstruction of what the Mercury's *Caesar* might have been. The tone of the picture tempts me to say that Linklater has chosen to identify not with Welles—despite his being the godfather of American independent filmmakers—but with the unformed, ultimately unambitious Richard. Yet this seems wrong. It slights another character in the story, who just might be the secret heroine.

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She is Gretta (Zoe Kazan), a would-be writer of Richard's own age, who smiles as much as Sonja but is openly sad, and labors steadily for her own portion of greatness but doesn't dare to believe she'll get it. Her brief, seemingly random encounters with Richard frame *Me and Orson Welles*, which after all the uproar of the Mercury Theatre comes back in the end to her and her wry, unassuming talent. I think the film, in its heart, is a tribute to Gretta's kind of artist; and she returns the compliment.

Wouldn't it be a good idea, she asks Richard, to write about two people meeting the way we just did? The story wouldn't need to have action; it could simply be a moment, like this. Evidently, Gretta is the kind of person who might enjoy Linklater's *Before Sunrise*.

But she might like *Me and Orson Welles*, too, despite all the hullabaloo.

November brought us George Clooney's voice in the best American film of 2009, Wes Anderson's *Fantastic Mr. Fox*—the most droll, inventive and visually delightful of the year's movies, the one with the quickest wit and furriest puppets, the only one to make you proud of your place in the vast Darwinian diversity (and appropriately humble about it, too). November also brought us George Clooney as an ensemble character actor in the self-produced, almost-based-on-a-true-story movie *The Men Who Stare at Goats*—not entirely terrific, maybe, but one of the few films this year to have anything to say about the Iraq War, and the only one to do it while exploring the alliance in American culture between moonstruck meliorism and deadly force.

And then, before the year could come to an end, George Clooney was back again, this time in full movie-star mode. Given this tripling up, the first thing to be said about Jason Reitman's *Up in the Air* is that it proves there's depth and variety in Clooney's persona as the cocksure guy with an edge of desperation. He hasn't yet worn out his welcome. And the second thing to be said is that Clooney hasn't worn out his social conscience, either. For his biggest role of the year, he chose to play a ghastly species of management consultant: the kind who flies around the country to foreclosed office buildings to tell employees their jobs no longer exist.

Based on a novel by Walter Kirn, *Up in the Air* starts with portraits of the disappearing American workforce but then re-

solves into the story of the consultant's relationships with two women: his sexual transactions (coldblooded at first, and always on the go) with a fellow citizen of first-class cabins and airport hotels (Vera Farmiga); and his struggles with a fellow worker, a bright-eyed kid just out of college (Anna Kendrick), who is threatening to ground him by changing the way his company does business. Economic misery becomes a pervasive background hum. The foreground is taken up by an increasingly thoughtful Clooney, a persistently irritating Kendrick (not her fault—she's just doing what she's been told) and Farmiga, whose innate warmth turns out to be the fuel for the whole movie.

Up in the Air makes much of being set in generic, transitional spaces, but it's hardly the first film to be located in the Great Nondescript. (The list encompasses everything from *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* to *About Schmidt*.) It also sells itself as a serious comedy—meaning that Reitman keeps trying to poke his elbow in your ribs, and sometimes hits your eye instead. To me, it's the least interesting of Clooney's three current films. But it is also the most urgent: a latter-day piece of Capracorn for the present American Depression.

Only a true master could have created the labyrinth of dramatic motifs, guilty secrets and film historical allusions that is Pedro Almodóvar's *Broken Embraces*—a mirrored labyrinth at that, where every element of the movie is reflected back on itself. At the center of this maze is the figure of a beautiful but hopeless woman (Penélope Cruz) who is remade by two competing men—a violently possessive tycoon (José Luis Gómez) and a brilliant filmmaker (Lluís Homar)—and so is destroyed by them. The story of this catastrophe, confessed in grief by the filmmaker (who has lived for years with its physical and emotional consequences), could easily have been as compelling as *Bad Education*, or *Talk to Her*. But even though *Broken Embraces* overflows with cinematic riches scene by scene, it doesn't deepen and gather momentum like the best of Almodóvar's work—perhaps because it's so bent on redeeming and celebrating the character of the filmmaker that it loses touch with its suffering heroine. I recommend it anyway; to be disappointed by Almodóvar is better than being satisfied by almost anyone else. But I worry, too. He's become so aware of being a great filmmaker that I fear he might forget to be a good one. ■

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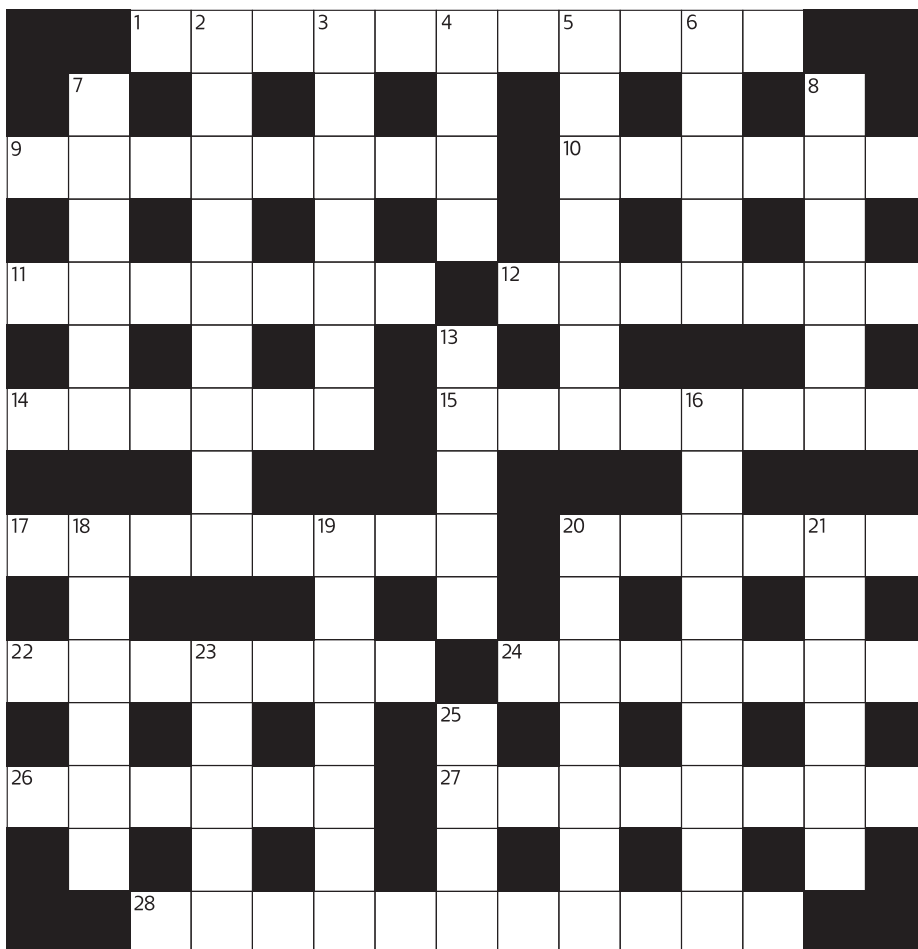
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ACROSS

- 1 Could be either I or Adam! (5,6)
 9 Placed in one which should be really progressive, but I'm using it right now! (8)
 10 Didn't bid with what you hear if over. (6)
 11 To be made up of what is continued shortly about a diminutive nun. (7)
 12 In an outstanding way, sort of angry about couple of numbers from old Rome. (7)
 14 Rolls here, for example. (6)
 15 It's an awful sin to take such wild rides, but such should be pretty hip, usually! (8)
 17 Serf's hen, twitchy, brightens things up. (8)
 20 A large number to put on a show with you and me, but it's bound to have its sticking points! (6)
 22 Scans around what would be great, in modern terms, and talks too! (7)
 24 Not Miss Muffet's favorites! (7)
 26 Put two and two together again, to fix things up! (6)
 27 Tenure is, perhaps, with lots of followers. (8)
 28 He directs customers, but the insomniac might be one, too. (11)

DOWN

- 2 They're not who they claim to be—the little devil so “up,” what's left is a mess! (9)
 3 Say about what might be found in the velvet glove, turned to give enough. (7)
 4 Carefully examine the twisted rope! (4)
 5 The man who takes things back (rats! one-fourth gone!) gives an account. (7)
 6 “Well, well, well,” says a well-known director! (5)
 7 Obviously, Rambo got arthritis in South America! (6)
 8 One of those found at the banks is let up on the French capital of Rouen. (6)
 13 Run water over a nervous siren! (5)
 16 Degeneracy starts this month on a study on the Common Era. (9)
 18 The door opened up around E.T., dizzy and unable to move. (6)
 19 Grab 'em! O, chaos! There's no entrance or exit with it. (7)
 20 Great! Cal eats Middle Eastern bread. (7)
 21 Sounds imaginary, but the kite flier and the projectionist do it. (6)
 23 If you don't succeed, adding fifty will only cause you to thrash about. (5)
 25 Boast is a common start to a quarrel. (4)



Correction: The solution to 14 down in Puzzle No. 3193 is not “brass” but “cross.”

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3195



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You deserve a factual look at . . .

Israel: A Light unto the Nations

Those who demonize Israel are either misinformed or malevolent

If that proverbial man from Mars came to visit and read the world's newspapers, especially those in the Arab and Muslim world, he would be convinced that Israel was the most evil nation in the world and the source of all of the world's strife.

What are the facts?

A nation to be emulated. The reality, of course, is that Israel is a nation, a society, that should be admired and emulated by many countries in the world. The very fact of how the State of Israel came into being is one of the most inspiring in history. Born out of the ashes of the Holocaust, it has emerged as one of the most advanced, productive and prosperous countries in the world.

The demonization of Israel, assiduously cultivated by the Muslim world, has reached a crescendo following Israel's recent defensive action in Gaza.

Instead of being grateful to the hated Jews for having totally withdrawn, the Palestinian Gazans showed their gratitude by almost daily pounding Israeli towns with close to 10,000 rockets and bombs. After countless warnings, Israel ultimately decided to put an end to this travesty.

When Israel finally did invade Gaza it took the most elaborate precautions not to hurt civilians. As a first in the history of warfare, Israel dropped tens of thousands of leaflets, warning the population and urging it to abandon areas in which military action would take place. The Israeli military made thousands of phone calls urging people to leave areas that would come under attack. But fighting in a densely populated environment is difficult and loss of civilian life is hard to avoid. Hamas fighters wear no uniforms. It is impossible to tell them from civilians. Is a person who allows a rocket launcher in his backyard a civilian or a fighter? And how about using schools, hospitals and mosques as munitions depots and staff centers? The hue and cry of Israel's demonizers in accusing it of "disproportionate force" is totally absurd. The ultimate insult, comparing Israel to the Nazis, is freely bandied about by Israel's detractors.

Israel is not an "apartheid state." Another familiar tack of Israel's vilifiers is to call it an "apartheid state," on the model of

former South Africa. But that is so ridiculous, so preposterous, it is hard to believe that serious people can countenance it. The exact opposite is the case. Israel is the only country in its benighted neighborhood in which people of all colors and religions prosper and have equal rights. Israel, expending substantial effort, rescued tens of thousands of black Jews from Ethiopia. And it has given assistance and absorbed countless

Christian expatriates from Sudan, who escaped from being slaughtered by their Muslim countrymen. Israel's over one million Arab citizens enjoy the same rights and privileges as

their Jewish fellows. They are represented in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, and are members of its bureaucracy, of its judiciary, and of its diplomatic service.

All over the world, Leftists, including in the United States and, sad to say, even in Israel itself, tirelessly condemn and vilify Israel. Why would they do that? First, of course, there is good old-fashioned anti-Semitism. Second, many of those who hate the United States vent their poison on Israel, which they consider being America's puppet in that area of the world. But Israel should certainly get top grades in all areas important to the Left. In contrast to all its enemies, Israel has the same democratic institutions as the United States. All religions thrive freely in Israel. Also, in contrast to all of its enemies, women have the same rights as men. The Chief Justice of Israel's Supreme Court is a woman. One-sixth of the Knesset are women. Compare that to Saudi Arabia, a medieval theocracy, where women are not allowed to drive cars, where they cannot leave the country without permission of a male relative, and where they can be and often are condemned to up to 60 lashes if the "modesty police" deems them not to be properly dressed in public. Gays and lesbians are totally unmolested in Israel; in the surrounding Muslim countries they would be subjected to the death penalty.

In spite of demonization and vilification by so much of the world, Israel is indeed a Light unto the Nations. The State of Israel is the foremost creation of the Jewish enterprise and Jewish intellect that has benefited every country in which Jews dwell, certainly our own country, the United States. Second only to the United States itself, Israel is the world's most important factor in science and technology, way out of proportion to the small size of its population. Israeli Jews are at the forefront of the arts, the sciences, law and medicine. They have brought all these sterling qualities to bear in building their own country: Israel. By necessity, they have also become outstanding in agriculture and, most surprisingly, in the military. What a shame that the Arabs opted not to participate in this progress and this prosperity and chose instead the path of revenge, of Jihad and of martyrdom. As the prophet Isaiah presaged: Israel is indeed a Light unto the Nations.

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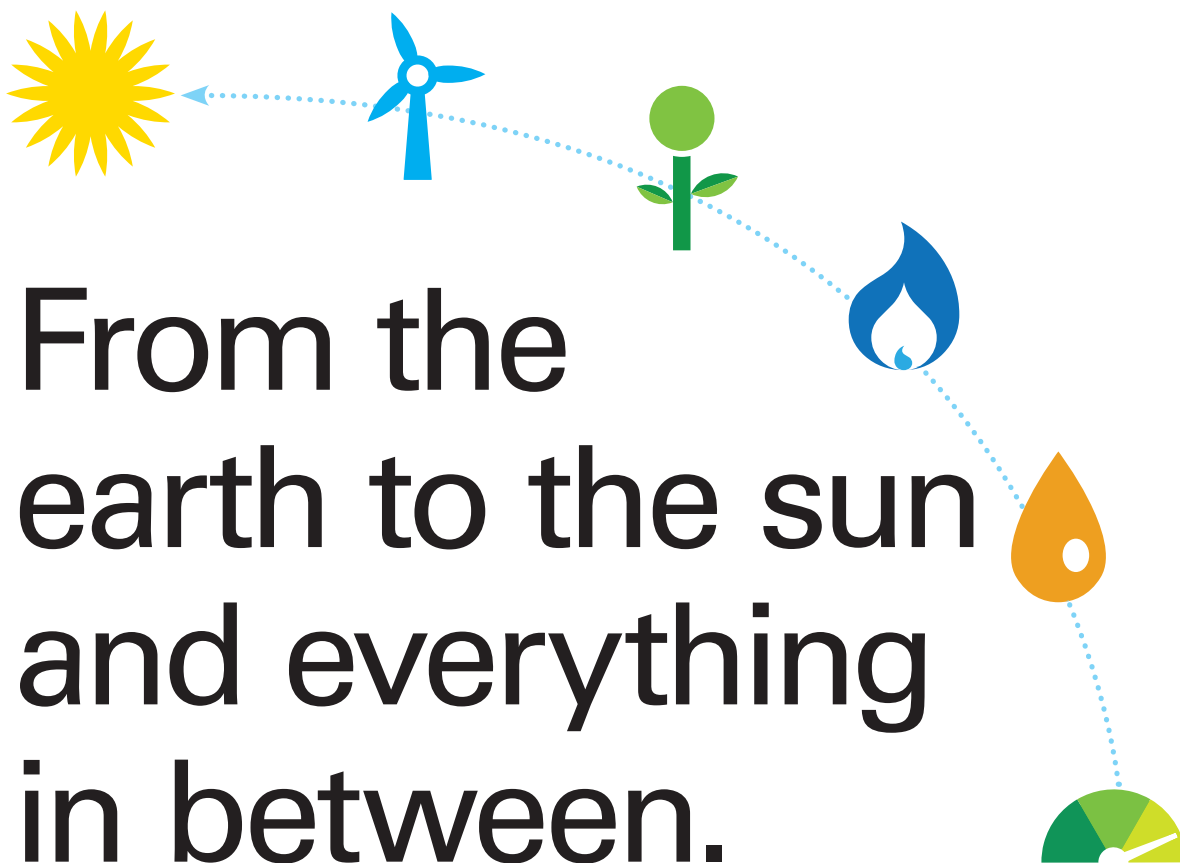
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